

KURO NO HIERA-GLAPHICOS

Colours the world, in this Fantasy Action

黒鋼の魔紋修復士

くろの
ヒエラ・
グラフィコス

嬉野秋彦

3

URESHINO
AKIHIKO

illust. ミユキルリア

Kuro no Hiera Glaphicos

vol.3

by Ureshino Akihiko

[Novel Updates](#)

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「ねえ、カリン。
このお茶会って、わたしたちが主賓でしょ？」
「ええ」

ヴァレリア・コスタクルタ
Valeria Costacurta

3

黒鋼の

くろのヒエラ・グラフィコス

魔紋修復士

KURO NO HIERA-GLAPHICOS

カリン・ルドベック
Karin Rudbeck



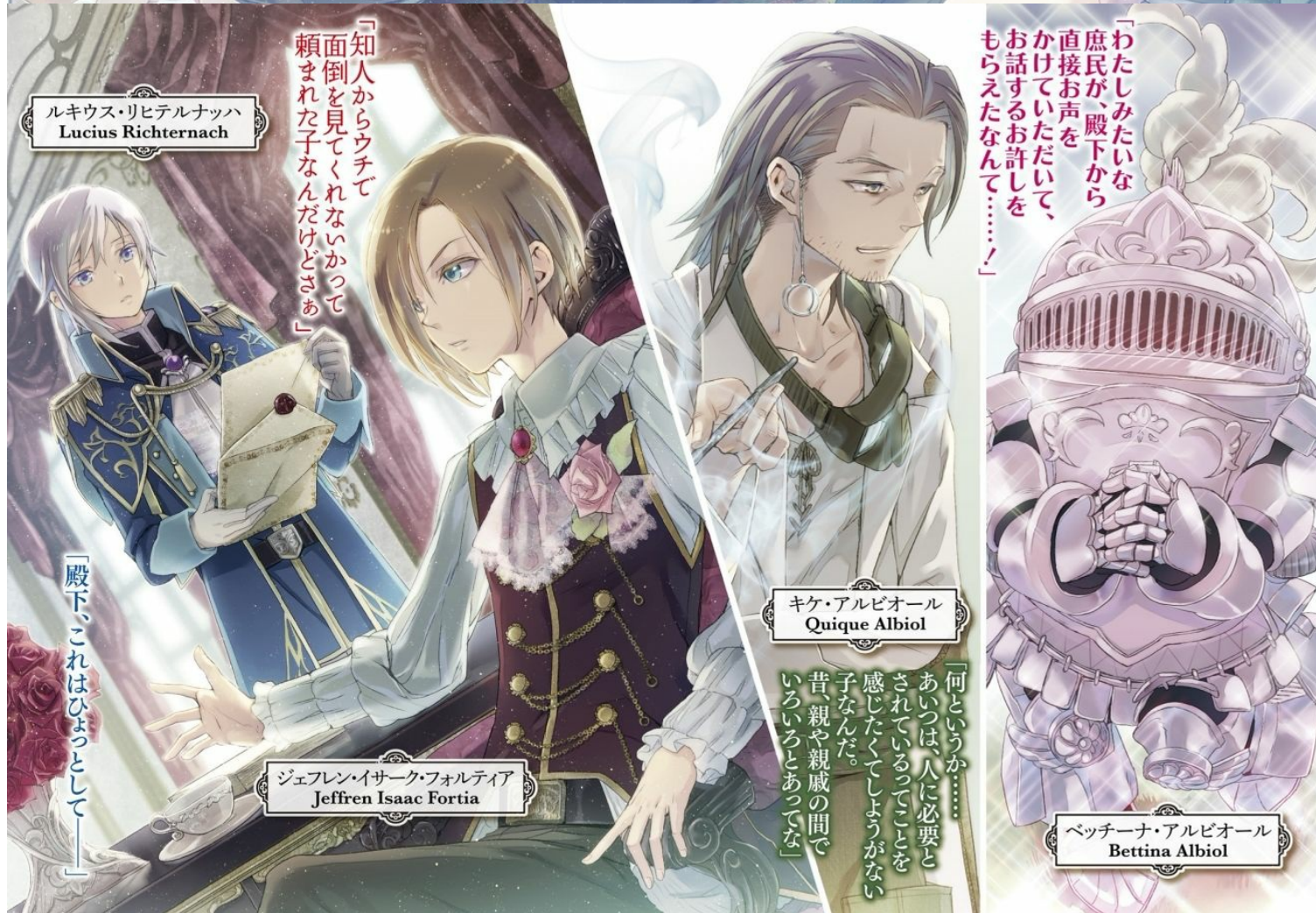
オルヴィエト・リヒテルナッハ
Orvieto Richternach

「ありがとうございます陛下。……ですが、そう思いなら、少しは彼女たちにお声をかけてあげてくださいませ」

ジェフレン・フランセスク・フォルティア
Jeffren Francesc Fortia

「それにしても、
こうして有能な
ふたりの神巫たちが
誕生したのも
すべてはおまえの
おかげだ。
礼をいうぞ、
オルヴィエト」

「どうして
こうなるわけ？」



ルキウス・リヒテルナッハ
Lucius Richternach

「知人からウチで
面倒を見てくれないかって
頼まれた子なんだけどもさあ」

「わたしみたいな
庶民が、殿下から
直接お声を
かけていたなんて、
お話するお許しを
もらえたなんて……！」

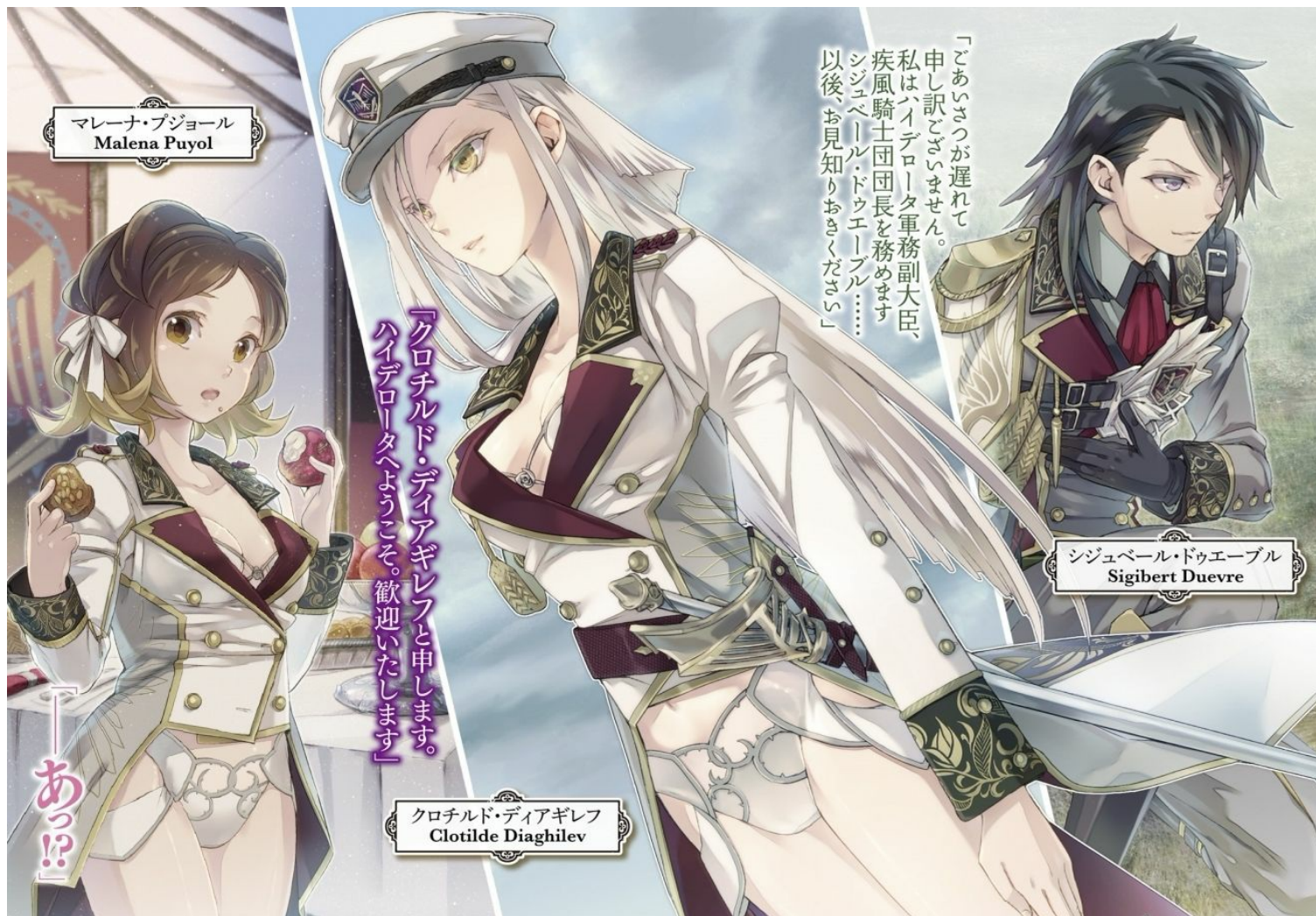
キケ・アルビオール
Quique Albiol

「何というか……
あいつは、人に必要と
されているってことを
感じたくてしょうがない
子なんだ。
昔親や親戚の間で
いろいろとあってな」

ジェフレン・イサーク・フォルティア
Jeffren Isaac Fortia

「殿下、これはひよつとして」

ベッチーナ・アルビオール
Bettina Albiol



マレーナ・プジョール
Malena Puyol

「クロチルド・ディアギレフと申します。
ハイデロータへようこそ。歓迎いたします」

クロチルド・ディアギレフ
Clotilde Diaghilev

「ごあいさつが遅れて
申し訳ございません。
私はハイデロータ軍務副大臣、
疾風騎士団団長を務めます
シジュベール・ドウエーブル……
以後、お見知りおきください」

シジュベール・ドウエーブル
Sigibert Duevre

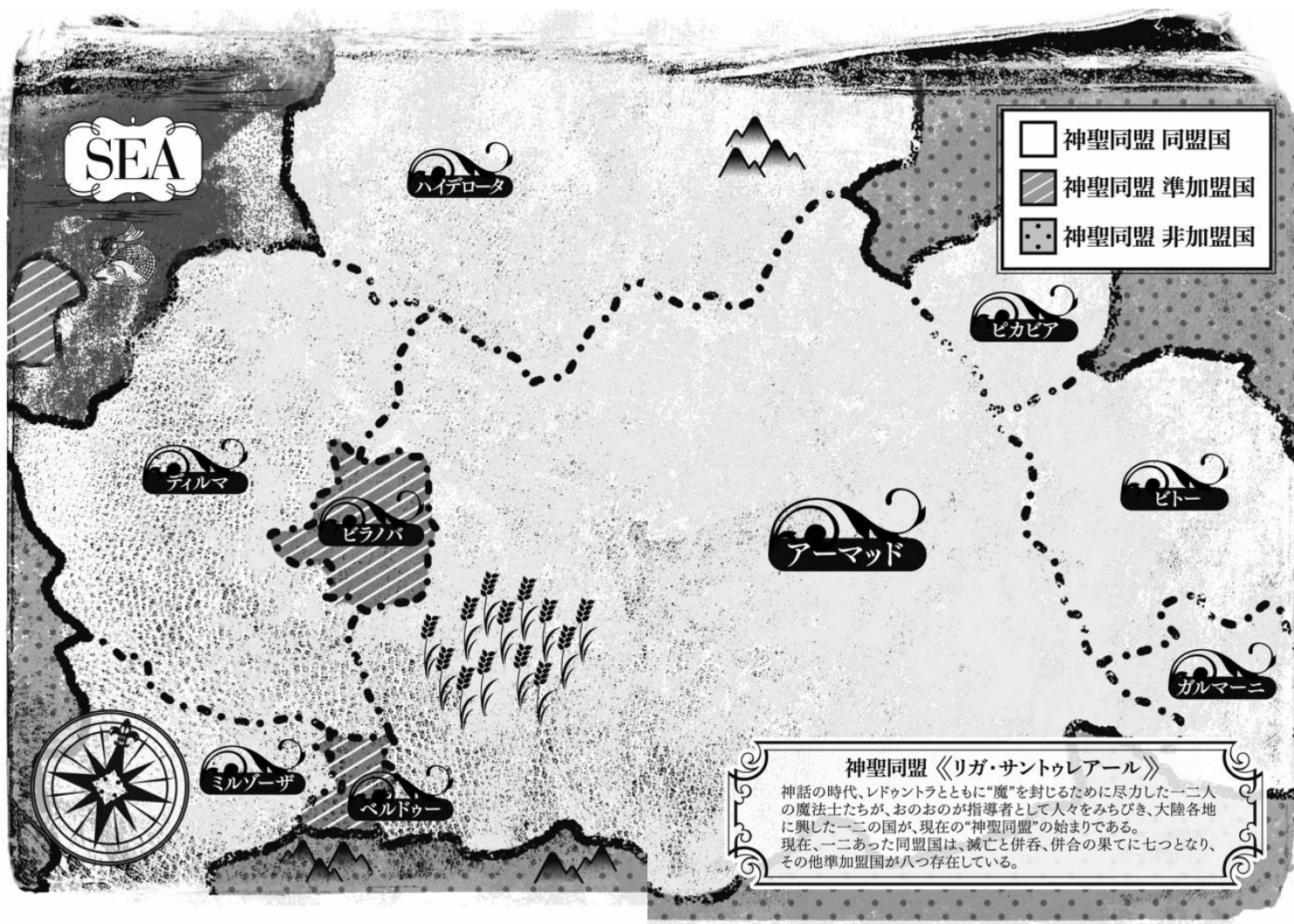
「あっ!!」

「端的にいつて、
おまえのほうが
カリンさまより、
ストリートに
笑顔が可愛い」

え!!
かっ、可愛い?」

ディミタール・リヒテルナツハ
Dimitar Richternach

ヴァレリアは両手でほっぺたを押さえたまま、
顔を赤くしてもごもごいっている。
まさかこんなふうにほめられるとは
思っていなかったんだろう。
単純といえば単純だが、裏表のない
こういう素直なところは、それこそ民衆に
広く愛される神巫にとっては重要な要素だ。



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Prologue: Strategy Discussion

Garden of philosophy—.

—The place that was called so was in a corner of the Roma's royal palace.

Although the sound of it made one associate it with a scholar's study that was surrounded by old books, it wasn't anything much, and was the greenhouse where the Crown Prince did his hobby, which was cultivating roses.

Crown Prince **Jeffren Isaac** exterminated pests, did pruning and watering with his humming mixed in occasionally, and was far off from the word called philosophy, but the numerous roses that he grew were—unexpectedly—all articles of rare beauty that were desired by not only internal, but also each country's dilettantes.

Conceding a hundred steps (*to give in, albeit unwillingly*), even if he wasn't a philosopher, it was undoubted that this Crown Prince's ability in cultivating roses outclassed the professionals.

Pointing the tip of the sword that was held in his hand to the sky, Jeffren Isaac narrowed his eyes.

"Just like that... the sword is an extension of your hand"

Dimitar who was waiting at a spot one step behind told Isaac so.

"Please imagine the magic power that's circulating inside your body moving along your arm and to your fingertips, and from there, flowing further towards the sword's tip"

It was hard to say that the unrefined sword which was wide and had no useless ornament was something suitable to be held by a country—the continent number one superpower Amaddo's Crown Prince. However, the moment Isaac pursed his lips, the brilliance of a crimson red that had emerged on the sword blade was surely accompanied by a certain mystique.

"Mu...!"

The Military Minister in attendance was heard leaking out a faint groan in surprise.

"...Ha—a!"

In a complete change, when Isaac who had opened his eyes wide swung the sword that was pointing at the sky, a vivid flame spouted from its tip.

"Oh—"

The Finance Minister who was beside the Military Minister raised a clear voice of surprise.

"...That was magnificent, Your Highness!"

"Iya iya"

Isaac, who had lowered the sword and gently wiped his forehead, took a deep breath greatly and looked back at everybody.

"—It's easier than I thought. I feel a little mentally tired though"

"Even though it's magic, it isn't something that can be used infinitely"

Lucius presented a mantle to Isaac who was wearing a blouse and explained.

"—When inexperienced people use magic many times within a short time, they'll accumulate fatigue in no time and become unable to move"

"That's to say, our army's magic warriors (*Furigana: Marefikos*) are trained to not become tired so easily even if they fire magic in succession?"

"That's correct"

"Fu—n"

Isaac, who had passed the sword to Dimitar and put on the mantle, rotated his neck lightly and took another deep breath.

The sunlight that poured down brilliantly reflected off the glass of the rose greenhouse and was dazzling to the eyes. It seemed that Isaac called this greenhouse where he immersed himself in his hobby with an exaggerated name of "Garden of Philosophy", but Dimitar couldn't understand what on earth was philosophical about playing around with roses at all.

But for Dimitar who supported Quique, it should be a delightful matter that Isaac was trying to deepen his understanding of magic engineering (*Furigana: Tekunorogia Marefika*).

Isaac stared at the military minister, Garido-kyou.

"—Well? Don't you think it's convenient that untalented people like me can also use magic in this way?"

"That's—with all due respect but"

Garido-kyou who boasted of an old yet imposing physique etched a deep crease on his brow with a "guu".

"As I see it, I don't think it's something that can be counted as a war potential on the battlefield. If it's the magic warriors' magic, they're better—"

"You're still saying such things? I believe just now wasn't because this is poor-quality, but that I'm lacking power though"

Isaac pointed at the sword that Dimitar was holding and shrugged his shoulders.

"—It can't be helped, explain a little, Richternach-kyou"

"...Ha"

Although he felt perplexed that the conversation was abruptly turned towards him, Dimitar didn't show it on his expression. Originally, Dimitar was here to take the place of Quique and teach the way of using Jorkera—the "magic motion sword (*Furigana: Espada Marefika*)" that Quique had presented to the Crown Prince. Knowledge was driven into his head so that he could roughly answer when he was questioned something.

Dimitar bowed slightly and said to Garido.

"Military Minister-kakka said that you don't think things like this can become the leading part of the battlefield, but then, what do you think is the leading part of the battlefield?"

"That's of course, cavalry. Infantry comes after that"

Garido-kyou stoked his firm chin and answered.

"Then, 1000 years ago?"

"...What?"

"Was the leading part of the battlefield the cavalry 1000 years ago too?"

Cavalry; in other words, a branch of the army wielding weapons on horseback was formed after stirrups were developed and soldiers could straddle atop horses. Before that, chariots that could be pulled by horses played an active role. Since even Dimitar knew this much, the Military Minister should know that cavalry itself was non-existent in the 1000 years ago when stirrups didn't exist.

"As Your Excellency knows, the leading part of the battlefield may change together with the era. ...Of course, our army's cavalry will play an active role as the main force for a long time hereafter too"

So as to not spoil the mood of Garido-kyou who loved cavalry, Dimitar continued while inserting a follow-up without fail.

"However, if a new invention is created, the entire army that adopted it needs to evolve too. Thinking that way, this magic motion sword is nothing more than one of the new weapons. What's important is how to incorporate it into strategy and tactics, isn't it?"

"...You've a point but—"

As usual, Garido-kyou's expression was stiff. It seemed that he was a more conservative person than heard in the rumours.

In reality, the magic of the degree which the Crown Prince had shown just now couldn't even replace fire arrows on the battlefield. Even if it did, for Amaddo's long bow unit, they could shoot more accurate fire arrows from even further, thus it might also be natural that Garido-kyou found it difficult to accept.

Dimitar inhaled a large breath and said to the Crown Prince.

"...Your Highness, instead of Chief Engineer (*Furigana: Maestro*), may I call his niece here?"

"Eh? The Chief Engineer's niece?"

"Hai. She's Bettina Albiol-jou who serves as Costacurta-geika's maidservant

and at the same time, works as the Chief Engineer's research assistant"

"Fuun... ma, all right. Let's meet her"

"Thank you very much. —Bettina-jou! His Highness has given his permission!"

"Ha, ha~i!"

When Dimitar shouted, a pink armour came running with a “gasha gasha” from the other side of the glass-sided greenhouse.

"T, thank you very much for allowing me to have an audience with Your Highness! I'm Quique Albiol's niece, Bettina! T, today, is a l, lucky day—"

"Ah—, dispense with the formal greetings, Bettina-jou"

Isaac held back Bettina who was overly tense and stared at the pink armour fixedly. Garido-kyou and Kaparos-kyou, and moreover their aides too, were staring in wonder.

"—So, what's this appearance, Bettina-jou?"

"T, this armour is called Bachururus—"

"It's one of the inventions that Chief Engineer developed. We shall now demonstrate its power"

Dimitar interrupted Bettina's speech and whispered secretly.

"—Oi, show this fellow's real worth to Military Minister-kakka"

"Ha, hai?"

"Show the power of Bachu-something"

"E—to... h, how?"

"The beanbag juggling game"

"Ehh? B, but—"

"It's fine, so do the beanbag juggling game"

"Haa, hai!"

Perhaps Bettina, who was bending her knees before the Crown Prince, was pestered by Dimitar repeatedly and had resolved herself, she stood up straight

and approached Garido-kyou.

"Then... excuse my rudeness"

"W, what are you—nuoa!?"

Bettina suddenly lifted up the large build of Garido-kyou who had reflexively put himself on guard.

"Bettina-jou is still 13 years old. Even though she's such a young girl, she's able to exhibit this sort of power. How's it, Your Excellency?"

"Hey, o, oooh—h!?"

Bettina threw Garido up into the air and caught him, threw him up and caught him; she was easily treating him exactly like a beanbag. Needless to say of the Crown Prince who was watching on the side, this was probably the best appeal to Garido-kyou.

"With this, I think you can understand a part of the magic engineering's real worth, but—"

"L, I, let me down! Oi!?"

"That's enough already, Gacha Pink"



"Haai"

Perhaps Garido-kyou, who had danced in mid-air for about 10 times and finally returned to the ground, felt dizzy as one would expected, he was leaning against his aide and wiping his sweat.

"G, good grief, all of a sudden, what are—"

"Please consider, Your Excellency. At some point in the future, all the soldiers of the Amaddo Army can manifest such power"

"....."

"However, if the army hesitates to adopt magic engineering here, other countries may obtain this power earlier. Just because we neglected the research of magic engineering, it doesn't mean that even other countries' researchers will follow it"

"Nu..."

Dimitar thereupon turned around to the finance minister, Kaparos-kyou.

"—In addition, this power isn't just a military affair, but can also be put to use in the areas of industry and agriculture"

"I see"

Kaparos-kyou, who had been keeping silent the whole time until then, nodded with a self-satisfied look while touching his pure-white beard that grew from his chin.

"When the wind's direction is poor and the windmill doesn't work, or when the water wheel doesn't work due to water shortage... that power may certainly be useful. Besides, it's also useful for cultivating the fields"

"That's how it is, Garido-kyou. —Regarding this matter, I intend to report it to Chichi-ue, telling him to formally put out a research budget "

Isaac fixed the cuffs of his blouse and spoke.

"If to the end, the army doesn't want to continue the research of magic engineering, I'll be responsible for Chief Engineer. I want to make my Chivalric Order into a group that can also fight seriously. I want their equipment to always be the latest and strongest ones"

"Your Highness, please allow me to be present too when you report to His Majesty. This is a very interesting research. It'll contribute greatly to our country's development"

Hearing Kaparos-kyou adding such words, Garido-kyou made his face increasingly grim.

"...If His Highness and even the Finance Minister say so, then it's unavoidable. ...Certainly, I don't want to fall behind Haiderota and the like in these areas"

"Thank you, Garido-kyou"

As they were able to somehow persuade the most difficult person, Dimitar and Lucius looked at each other and smiled slightly.

"—By the way, you're a girl, right?"

"Ah!"

There was no time to stop him; Isaac raised Bachururus's visor with a "gachan", specially bent over and looked inside.

"....."

Isaac and Bettina stopped their movements as though frozen in place like that for a while and didn't say a single word.

Before long, when Isaac closed the visor, turned back and folded his arms with a pensive look on his face,

"...Bettina-jou"

"Ha, hai?"

"From now on, don't take off that armour in front of people unnecessarily. — Is that all right?"

"Ha...? Ah, ha, hai... in the first place, I'm always wearing it"

"Then that's good. —I hope Richternach-kyou will also let her be as such"

"...Acknowledged"

Although he didn't understand why he was told such a thing, Dimitar obediently agreed.

In any case, he had fulfilled his obligation towards Quique.

Kuro no Hiera Glaphicos V3 Chapter 1

Disclaimer: I do not guarantee a 100% accurate translation. Do kindly notify me if you see any mistake.

Ally and Imaginary Enemy

Amaddo and its neighbouring country, Diruma, had, in these several hundred years, been strengthening their alliance by means of marriages between fellow royal families. That the “**Holy Alliance (Furigana: Riga Santourear)**” was in a long stable state was probably due to the firm friendship between Amaddo that boasted the greatest national power in the alliance and Diruma that possessed the third greatest national power.

However, it couldn't be said that there was no cause of conflict in the alliance that looked firm.

The superior of the north, **Haiderota**.

This country which had a national power that ranked below Amaddo's in the alliance was advancing its **military expansion** with a clear intent.

They didn't try to conceal their **ambition** of wanting to replace Amaddo and becoming the leader of the alliance.

If one were to speak of a place that was overflowing with flowers within the castle of Amaddo, then the Crown Prince's greenhouse came to mind in the foremost, but this courtyard was a comfortable location as well.

As Queen Almudena, who was now in the middle of recuperating in a royal villa on her parent's side, liked gardening since her early years, the Crown Prince's hobby might have been influenced by his mother. However, in contrast to the bias-like—fussiness that, in some respects, existed in the Crown Prince's playing around with roses, it felt like the flowers which decorated this garden had a broad-mindedness that accepted anything. Although a lot of flowers seemed to be planted disorderly at a glance, they were somehow pleasing to the eyes.

One would feel that spreading a white table in such a courtyard, inviting a beautiful woman and beautiful girls and treating them to tea in a fine early afternoon didn't suit this fortitudinous king in any way.

After all, speaking of the 11th generation Jeffren, he was a military man who made a name for himself with his battle skills. Compared to sipping tea with a teacup, gulping down sake with a large beer mug was more like him.

Perhaps he had such awareness himself, the great man who wanted to stand on the battlefield despite being past 40 picked up the thin cup snugly, sipped the tea and frowned openly.

"Your Majesty"

Orvieto who was drinking tea in a graceful manner looked at the king fleetingly with upturned eyes.

"—If you dislike its bitterness, won't it be fine if you put sugar into it?"

"This degree can't be called bitter"

King Jeffren Francesc who had placed the cup down folded his thick arms and smiled wryly.

"I—ah— ...simply put, I prefer sake"

"I understand"

"However, everyone said that a military-style drinking feast isn't suitable for inviting young ladies and expressing my gratitude"

"Thank you very much for doing this specially"

Karin who was drinking tea beside Valeria bowed her head. Seeing that, Valeria also lowered her head hurriedly.

The king, who had just returned from his mistress's side, invited Valeria and Karin, and Orvieto as well, to the royal palace to personally thank the Dominas who had assisted in the resolving of troubles during his absence.

—Was what Valeria heard.

But after sitting on this seat for about 30 minutes, she began to feel that the situation was peculiar somehow.

"—Nee, Karin"

Stretching her hand to a marzipan that was made in the shape of a wild berry, Valeria whispered to Karin softly.

"Isn't something strange?"

"Yes"

"Right? Isn't that so? We're the guests of honour at this tea party, right?"

"Yes"

"Despite that, His Majesty is mostly talking to Head Director only since just now!"

"So it seems"

"Why did it become like this?"

"...This is a story that I've also heard from Petra though"

Scooping the jam of rose's petals with a silver spoon and dissolving it into her black tea, Karin replied in a low voice.

"When he wasn't engaged yet, His Majesty—or rather, I think he was the crown prince at that time; but anyway, more than 20 years ago, it seemed that His Majesty proposed to Head Director and was rejected"

"—Eh?"

"Like I said, it's a story about His Majesty being rejected by Head Director"

"....."

While leaving her mouth open with a “boka”, Valeria stared at the king and Head Director.

Indifferent to the young ladies who were whispering like that, the king even reached out his left hand shrewdly and grasped Orvieto's hand while stroking his manly beard.

"—Nevertheless, it's all thanks to you that two capable Dominas are born like this. I've to express my gratitude, Orvieto"

"Thank you very much, Your Majesty. ...But if you really think that way, then

please call out to them a little"

Indeed, the king's goodwill towards Orvieto was expressed well in that over-familiar tone. Even though there was an onlooker with an amazed expression nearby—and despite being told to call out to the girls—the king paid no attention to Valeria and Karin.

"...By the way, Your Majesty"

Pinching the back of the king's left hand and tearing it away with her fingers, Orvieto spoke coldly.

"How's Queen-denka's condition? Has she not returned from Gruma yet?"

"Ah? Un, ma— ...about that, hora, you said to put our focus here just now—"

"You're right. Today is the tea party to thank both Her Eminences"

When Orvieto smiled cheerfully and said so immediately, the king sighed exaggeratedly and smiled wryly.

"Yare yare, as expected, it's no good, huh! Even though it has been nearly 20 years since your husband died, your behaviour is stiff as ever"

"I shall take that as a praise"

Bowing respectfully, Orvieto looked at Valeria and Karin.

"—I believe this goes without saying, but please don't carelessly make a move on these two people too. To say nothing of Amaddo, it'll become a big problem of the entire alliance as well"

"I'm fully aware of such a thing! Or rather, even I won't make a move on girls who are younger than my son, you know? I'm clear about the boundary of such a matter"

"Please cease that sort of vivid talk in front of the maidens who serve God"

"Iya—, sorry sorry"

The king, who had laughed with a "gahaha" and scratched his head, ordered a maid who was waiting at a short distance away to prepare brandy.

"Your Majesty. Having sake in daytime is—"

"To put it bluntly, I dislike black tea. I can't comprehend the feelings of those guys who appreciate things like this"

"In that case, this won't be a tea party"

"Do you want to see me frown whenever I sip a mouthful of tea?"

"I shall humbly decline"

"Maa that's how it is"

When Orvieto closed her mouth with a sigh, the king finally faced the girls and smiled broadly.

"—I've heard about the Seriba and Biranoba's matters from Kamunyas. It's said that both of you did splendid work that was unexpected of a new Dominas?"

"Thank you very much"

"Though its order with your first job had reversed, we must still hold your debut ceremony grandly. —What do you think, Orvieto; what kind of idea will be good? Since it was made flashy to that extent on Shakira's occasion, I want to make this extravagant no matter what"

"Is it because there are two people at the same time?"

"To put it simply, that's right. At that time, if you hadn't refuse it to the end, who'd Father choose to be the top student—"

"Babel-geika, I suppose"

Laconically yet clearly, Orvieto gave an immediate reply.

It was heard that when she was still a girl—when the present king was the crown prince—Orvieto was chosen to be one of the Dominas candidates; but because her mother who was the head of the Richternach House had died, she gave up the path of a Dominas and succeeded the house. At that time, Orvieto didn't have a father or brothers and sisters already, thus she had no choice but to get a husband and give birth to an heir for the sake of continuing the Richternach House.

At that time, the one that had competed with Orvieto was Shakira Babel who

commanded the entire alliance's Dominas as their head even now. That Orvieto and Shakira were collectively called the "Pair of Bright Jewels" wasn't only because the pair was simply the best magic warriors (*Furigana: Marefikos*) in Amaddo; the fact that they were fellow rivals who had worked hard together since girlhood might have been the cause too.

He poured the brandy which he had the maid prepared into the black tea to the brim, and similar to a boss of an outskirts' bar gulping down cheap sake and then grumbling—naturally, Valeria had never actually seen that sort of people though—the king emptied the cup with a sigh. With this, it was unclear whether he was drinking black tea containing sake or drinking black-tea-flavoured sake.

"Puha—a", the king took a breath and nodded greatly.

"That's right... there's the contribution from Romarikku this year, so there's totally no problem budget-wise. Let's invite lots of guests from the whole country and make it extraordinary and grand. Afterwards—"

The king began to say so and thereupon, Home Minister Moroku Kamunyas came dashing with a "dota dota".

"—Your, Your Majesty~!"

"Oh, you've become able to read the situation, Kamunyas-kyou. I was just thinking of calling you. About this time's debut—"

"S, save that talk for later! As a matter of fact, just not long ago, an express messenger from Haiderota carrying a letter that has their king's signature had arrived—"

"Haiderota?"

The king, who was smiling mainly at Orvieto until then, knitted his thick eyebrows and started speaking bitterly in displeasure as soon as he heard "Haiderota".

"...What in the world does such an uncivilised second-rate country want with our country?"

"That, he said that it's an urgent matter at any rate..."

Kamunyas, who had wiped his sweat and came before the king, held out a

letter that was roundly rolled up and fastened with a ribbon.

"Haiderota is tentatively our ally, right?"

Valeria whispered into Karin's ear secretly.

"—Considering all that, wasn't that an extreme way of speaking just now?"

Although it was harsh to call an ally a second-rate country, the 11th generation Jeffren was originally referred to as the king who loved war the most in the continent. To be called uncivilised by such a war enthusiast, even Haiderota might lose its face.

Thereupon, Orvieto answered Valeria's question instead of Karin.

"His Majesty loathes Haiderota because that country treats its populace's livelihoods as sacrifices and advances its military expansion. His Majesty calls that uncivilised"

"Is that so? I've certainly heard that Haiderota is a powerful country with a very severe military doctrine, but—"

Haiderota was a military superpower which boasted a national power that ranked below Amaddo's. As a signatory of the Holy Alliance (*Furigana: Riga Santourear*) that believed in Redountra, it was a friendly nation as well as the greatest rival to Amaddo—it was a story that even Valeria who was ignorant of worldly affairs would hear often. In any case, it seemed that the people of Haiderota had been thinking of wanting to oust Amaddo and becoming the leader of the alliance themselves.

Karin supplemented Valeria who was spreading jam onto a scone and eating with a "mogu mogu".

"—Especially after the civil war that happened nearly a hundred years ago, they make the expansion of their military preparations the highest priority without caring about how others see them"

"Due to that, I feel that exacerbating the citizens' dissatisfaction is putting the cart before the horse, but... Your Majesty, what kind of matter is it exactly? If it's all right with you, please let us hear about it too"

"Rather than that, this matter concerns you"

The king held out the letter to Orvieto and pointed at Valeria and Karin in turn.

"—Eh? U, us..., is it?"

"—Indeed. ...This is completely a harassment of Haiderota"

Folding his thick arms, the king caused the chair to creak and leaned back on it.

"—Kamunyas, the Haiderota's messenger is still here, right?"

"Ha, hai"

Kamunyas, who had shrewdly gotten someone to prepare a seat and drank the black tea, took a breath with a "hotto" and nodded.

"He said that he can't return unless he has heard His Majesty's reply... so, what exactly does the letter from Haiderota say?"

"It told me to hold the Dominas' debut"

"...Debut?"

Karin narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

"...I'm sorry, Your Majesty. If it's our debut, then even without being told by Haiderota—"

"Of course, that's my intention from the beginning; the other party should also be aware of such a matter"

"In short—"

Orvieto who had looked over the letter passed it to Kamunyas this time and continued in a calm voice.

"—They want to ascertain whether the two of you really have the qualifications to be the cruxes of the seal, I guess"

"That... is Haiderota perhaps saying that we don't have the qualifications of a Dominas!?"

"Guguu", a deep crease grew in Valeria's brow. She never had the experience of a foreign country's government—it'd have been better if it was her country's

—criticising her position of a Dominas which she had undergone that much hardships, won through the intense competition and obtained with great difficulty.

Placating Valeria who had instinctively begun to half-rise to her feet, Orvieto spoke.

"Originally, a Dominas is a selected person whom a whole country gives all its efforts and raises by spending several years. The training of a Dominas is something which takes that much effort; if I were to rephrase it, it's something which ought to take that much effort"

"...In, in other words...?"

"Even though selecting one Dominas originally takes that much time, both of you were selected at the same time"

"...Since two people were chosen simultaneously, the time taken is one half; does it mean our abilities are doubtful because we're Dominas who were chosen in half the time?"

Karin murmured indifferently.

"Normally, replacing two Dominas all at once in a country is an unlikely situation. In the first place, besides our country, the countries that have two or more Dominas are only Diruma and Haiderota; but customarily, the replacements will always stagger for a period of around several years, and then will they be allowed"

"After all, a veteran Dominas retiring from her position and is taken over by a new Dominas means that the one protecting the seal weakens temporarily"

Having drunk up the black tea that contained brandy, the king poured brandy into the cup, which didn't even have a drop of black tea, this time and drank this up in one gulp again. Spitting out a breath smelling of alcohol with a "fuha~a", he snorted in displeasure.

"And that's why, deliberately taking time and carefully selecting the Dominas candidates are so that the effect of the protector's weakening becomes a minimum; and deferring the period and then allowing the replacement are so that the Dominas aren't all newcomers—they probably want to say that our

country which didn't abide by such a general rule is outrageous"

"Even in our country that has three Dominas, it has been more than twenty years ago that two people took over simultaneously... since the time when Babel-geika was chosen"

"However, the case this time—"

That Valeria and Karin were chosen simultaneously was because the two positions of the Dominas who will finish her term of office of nine years and retire, and the Dominas who had to retire due to health reason would be vacant at the same time incidentally. Speaking of inevitability, then this was inevitable; it wasn't because Orvieto and the king aimed for something and did so.

In addition, Valeria and Karin, who were chosen to be the Dominas in this time's replacement, were two people who possessed abilities that was difficult to say which of the two was better—it was none other than Orvieto who had evaluated so. The certification of the celebrated "Witch of Sunlight" wasn't just for show. Hence, Valeria believed that hers and Karin's abilities shouldn't fall behind other countries' Dominas'. She didn't believe that her disposition as a seal's protector was especially inferior either.

"—Perhaps to those guys, whether your abilities are suitable for a Dominas or not, such a matter is inconsequential"

Making the chair scream with a "gishiri", the king stood up.

"Or rather, I even feel they might be hoping that your abilities are low"

Dominas were the greatest magic warriors who stood at the peak of the country, and those abilities were one of the measurements indicating the level of the magic warriors of an entire country. With such a meaning, for Haiderota which was thinking of kicking down Amaddo, it was obvious that the abilities of Amaddo's Dominas being low would be better than being high.

The king snatched the letter from Kamunyas's hands and crumpled it into a ball.

"Your, Your Majesty!?"

"I've read its contents. Such a thing isn't needed anymore, right?"

The king threw back the letter, which was balled hard and small, to Kamunyas and looked back at the girls angrily.

"—I'm sure that Haiderota's ill-natured people saying these things is a plot to annoyingly make excuses and try to see our skills. How about you, Orvieto?"

"I think so too, Your Majesty"

Orvieto bowed her head courteously and concurred with the king's opinion.

"To begin with, there's no regulation that Dominas must hold a debut for foreign countries. In fact, such an event didn't take place when Haiderota's Dominas took over four years ago and last year"

"It's a different matter if it was just us who weren't invited"

"The purpose of Haiderota demanding our country to hold it this time is evidently the assessment of both Her Eminences. Their real aim is to ascertain both Her Eminences' abilities and calibres as magic warriors"

"Even without being told, I intend to hold it grandly"

Snorting with a "fufun", the king smiled. Completely different from the time when he was smiling broadly at Orvieto until a while ago, it was a bold smile.

"Well then... what shall I do? Summon every one of the other side's royal family?"

"In that case, Your Majesty"

Orvieto spoke to the king who was constantly licking his lips.

"—How about going there of our own accord?"

"Of our own accord?"

"Haiderota wants to see both Her Eminences' abilities, right? If that's the case, we just have to show them. In return, let's have the other side show us their Dominas too. It's a good opportunity for both Her Eminences to broaden their knowledge; after all, it's not like there will be chances to see a foreign country's Dominas in person"

"I see... that seems to be interesting"

"Girari", the king's eyes sparkled at Orvieto's suggestion.

"If we send in both Her Eminences as diplomats, even Haiderota has to take on the etiquette of entertaining state guests. How much hospitality is Haiderota which spends all its time in military expansion capable of... we just have to make them waste money as much as possible"

"__"

Staring seriously at Orvieto who had declared so at once, Valeria became speechless. It was because she learnt that Orvieto was someone who said scarier things than she had imagined.

"...I'm sorry, did you just realise it now? As expected, you're a natural airhead"

When Valeria secretly told that to Karin, her friend with cold eyes mercilessly insulted her after adding a completely insincere apology at the beginning.

"She wouldn't be qualified to be the magic academy's (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*) head director just by being simply carefree, would she? She'll surely have a political sense of that extent"

"Iya, but, how do I say this—"

"...Maa, I also agree with your view of this being different from your mental image though"

From the fact that Orvieto had forcibly pushed for Dimitar to be her exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, Valeria already understood that she was a calm yet high-handed person. However, in regard to the current Orvieto who was closely face to face with the king and Kamunyas and plotting this and that, Valeria could also catch a glimpse of her side as a cool-headed schemer.

While waiting for the adults' discussion to end, Valeria quietly sipped the black tea which had cooled completely.



Distantly gazing at the army's infantry who were training, Dimitar sat on a barrel of the eaves' edge. Being inside the workshop that was filled with the smell of tobacco whenever he went there, even his work efficiency would fall.

Moreover, rain was scarce lately, and days of fine weather continued. In that

case, it wasn't bad to work outside like this too.

Crossing his legs and placing the sword on his knees, and then drinking a mouthful of wine from a leather bag, Dimitar picked up a steel pen.

"—"

Dimitar used the steel pen and carved detailed designs onto the blade of the sword which was sprayed with coarse metal powder that he didn't fully know of. It was tiresome to have to put in his strength and carve these lines, which could usually be drawn smoothly with one finger, with a "gari gari (*scratching sound*)".

"...Maa, it saves me the trouble that he (*Isaac*) didn't make a fuss of it (*wielding Jorkera*) being painful though"

"Oi, Di"

Quique Albiol, who had suddenly shown his face from the workshop's window, indicated the sword that he made and asked Dimitar. It was the new magic motion sword (*Furigana: Espada Marefika*), Jorkera, which Dimitar had taught the way of using it to the Crown Prince yesterday.

"—Though the letter from His Highness stated that it's all right to complete it as it is, does it still have to be modified?"

"Yeah. I figured that it's probably still a little heavy for the Crown Prince to use. ...Since that sort of person is using it, it's apparent that it'll be decorated gaudily at any rate. In fact, it's better to take into consideration that it'll become a bit heavier and modify it"

"Even though you said that"

Smoking the kiseru with a "pukari", Quique put on his monocle again.

"—At this point in time, by how much will be good to reduce to make it light?"

"I think it's possible to shorten it by about two fingers' width. Since there are many cases of the sword's tip being chipped unexpectedly in a melee, I didn't put magic crest (*Furigana: Hierateika*) there from the start"

"That's true. Next is... carving a coulisse in the centre?"

"Yeah. At the same time, it's better to lengthen the hilt a bit more. With the centre of gravity close to the grip, it'll become easy even for the frail His Highness to handle"

"Either way, we can only leave such a matter to Krutowa-jiisan. ...It'll be nice if it's completed by tomorrow though"

"By tomorrow?"

Dimitar suddenly raised his face and looked at Quique.

"Were you told to complete it by tomorrow?"

"There's also the work of the jewellery craftsman, so he wished for it to be delivered to the royal palace in the noon the day after tomorrow"

"Don't tell me... even His Highness intends to go out?"

"Ha? What's this about His Highness?"

"It means His Highness may soon have something to do where he'll carry the new sword and go out"

If there was a time when the Crown Prince, who often played around with roses all day long, would carry a sword on his waist, then it'd be during some formal ceremony; otherwise, it might be when the Seal Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Tanpries Aegis*) made an appearance. And speaking of a large ceremony that was to be scheduled in the future, Valeria and Karin's debut came to mind first, but because the fixed date for that would be decided after this, there shouldn't be a need to hurry to that extent.

"Does something comes to your mind?"

"Though I didn't hear the official word, that doesn't mean there's none. ... However, that Highness has a side which I don't fully understand what's he thinking and will abruptly think of worthless things"

"Oi oi, you're being disrespectful"

Smiling bitterly at Dimitar's words, Quique withdrew into the workshop.

As if changing places with that, a pink mass went round the workshop and ran here, dragging along noisy footsteps with a "gacha gacha".

"Dimi-saan!"

"...Don't make the ground tremor. I'm doing an intricate work. If my hand slips and I pierce the steel pen into my thigh, I'll put in a centipede through that slit"

"Mun, though I hate centipedes, thank you very much!"

"...Ha?"

Dimitar knitted his eyebrows at Bettina who had suddenly knelt before him and begun to worship him.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"It's about yesterday's matter desuyou! Isn't it thanks to Dimitar-san that I was able to have an audience with His Highness desukaa?!"

"That, huh. Though His Highness is certainly a noble person, don't you often see him on the streets?"

Calling it a manoeuvre of the Seal Chivalric Order and going here and there without a purpose; taking a group of attendants and going to the town's market to buy rose's seedlings; the Crown Prince was relatively a royalty who would appear in town. Subsequently, he was recognised as a wastrel son by the populace, but at any rate, —though phrasing it badly—he wasn't really someone unusual.

"T, that's not it desuu! After all... a commoner like me could receive a personal greeting from His Highness and get the permission to talk to him...! I was so moved that my pee seemed to have leaked!"

Shaking her pink body with a "furu furu", Bettina sniffled like she was overcome with emotion. Most likely, her cheeks were wet with streams of tears beneath that visor. Although he wanted to check what kind of tear-stained face was it, he was specially told not to touch such a thing (*Bachururus*) by the Crown Prince, hence it was better to not think about imprudent things.

"I've always thought that Dimi-san might be a cold, scary and relatively terrible person, but I was mistaken!"

"...Oi"

"As expected, Dimi-san is a good person desunee!"

"I know. I understand, so don't sidle up to me anymore. ...I said that I'm in a middle of an intricate work, didn't I?"

If he left her as she was, Bettina might cling onto Dimitar's lap and choked in tears of gratitude. Although there were various remarks that bothered him, they weren't to the extent of raising the corner of his eye and scolding her; Dimitar decided to sweep them aside for the time being and concentrate on his work.

"...By the way Dimi-san, that, what are you doing desukaa?"

Bettina, who had turned her back to Dimitar and made a "gachagoso" sound, sniffled and asked at this late hour. She had probably raised her visor and wiped away her tears.

"—It's different from the one that was shown to His Highness yesterday, right?"

"That one will include minor adjustments and then be presented to His Highness. —This one is a prototype for normal mass production. For now, I've to complete it into something which has a better efficiency than Nereida's products that was confiscated in Biranoba"

"Are you perhaps drawing magic crests desukaa?"

"Ma, it's a rough sketch though"

Originally, the research of Magic Engineering (*Furigana: Tekunorogia Marefika*) was done by Quique's own effort, but it seemed that getting someone to design magic crests was also difficult at that time. Most of the capable Hiera Glaphicos were busy and they scarcely had the free time to lend a hand in Quique's suspicious research.

It was after Dimitar, who was expelled from the Seal Chivalric Order, went in and out of this workshop that it (*Quique's research*) became smooth in one breath. Dimitar who had begun to advance on the path of a Hiera Glaphicos could draw magic crests according to Quique's theory; furthermore, he could also handle the completed weapon better than an average person and assist in its improvement based on his feeling of using it. In that sense, it was possible to

say that Dimitar was the ideal assistant for Quique.

It was because such a past existed that Dimitar somehow continued to be the assistant even now when Quique's research was being recognised by the public. If the magic motion sword that Quique invented was officially adopted, all members of the Seal Chivalric Order would be carrying swords engraved with the magic crests that Dimitar had designed.

It was amusing somehow and Dimitar unintentionally laughed.

"...What's the matter, Dimi-san?"

"It's nothing"

Dimitar, who had finished drawing the magic crests, blew off the iron powder with a "fuu" and stood up.

Afterwards, once this blade was given a treatment similar to plating with a special alloy, it was possible to draw magic crests on it just like on the human skin, but Dimitar's work was up to here for now. As for the plating, it was the domain of the blacksmith that Quique was acquainted with.

Closing the book that he had used as reference for the designs of the magic crests and holding it under his arm, Dimitar peered into the workshop through the window.

"Oi, Ossan!"

"N? Is it done? As expected, the Hiera Glahpicos-dono who has expectations placed on his future sure works fast"

Quique who was applying black paint onto Jorkera's tip looked in the direction of Dimitar fleetingly.

"What, are you going back already?"

"The next mission has been decided in private. There are preparations for it"

"I see... huh, hold on? Does that possibly mean Bettina too?"

"That's likely to be the case. ...The official appointment will be announced at that time, I guess. At any rate, Gacha Pink has become a person who is allowed to have an audience with His Highness"

"Ah, that's true"

Quique struck the head of the kiseru against the rim of the ashtray and spat out a seemingly comical smile from the bottom of his heart together with a pale purple smoke.

"...Iya, frankly speaking, you've helped me out"

"On what?"

"How should I say it... she's a child who can't help but want to feel needed by people. Many things happened between her parents and relatives and her in the past, you see"

"Is that so?"

"For such a child, to be recognised by the people of the royal family and even get to talk to them might be quite a happy thing. Rebellious people like you and me might think that it isn't something to feel that grateful about though, right?"

"....."

Dimitar shifted his gaze from the inside of the workshop, which wasn't shine by the sun, to outside where the sunlight was raining incessantly.

The pink armour, which was reflecting brilliant sunlight with a "kirari (*momentary flash of light*)", was moving large wooden boxes with a "gacha gacha" with her humming mixed in, seemingly oblivious to Dimitar and her uncle having such a conversation. With a patron called the Crown Prince siding with Quique's research, it looked like this workshop was gradually becoming lively.

"...Even if that was the case, I didn't do anything in particular. In order to show an easy understanding of the results of your research, I just thought that using Gacha Pink was the fastest"

"Ah, that might be so. However, it was definitely thanks to you"

"...This is unlike you"

Feeling that Quique would bow to him and express his gratitude again if he were to stay like that, Dimitar threw the sword onto the worktable and left that place at a quick pace.

Maybe it was because he couldn't thank people very well that Dimitar wasn't good with being thanked by people. Especially towards an expression of gratitude which was filled with sincerity that wasn't just superficial, he didn't know what was good to say in return, so he felt needlessly troubled.

Therefore, Dimitar left the workshop at a quick pace.

He might have to leave the capital soon because of an important mission again.

Before that, there were things that he must do.



When the Crown Prince summoned Lucius for Seal Chivalric Order's business, it was often the case that it'd be at the "Garden of Philosophy" almost every time, but today was unusual; there was an order saying to come to a private room inside the castle.

Thinking that the Crown Prince most likely wanted to exclude other people and talk with just the two of them, Lucius who had arrived at the Crown Prince's room alone in the afternoon quickly learnt of the correctness of his prediction.

"—I want to divide it into the First Army and Second Army"

Piling up a large quantity of documents on the desk, Isaac said with a sigh mixed in. The maid who had carried tea here had left already, and there were only Lucius and the Crown Prince inside the spacious room.

"Ah, I believe you understand even without me saying this, but I'm talking about the Seal Chivalric Order, you know?"

"That is, hai"

Looking down on the two mountains of documents built in front of the Crown Prince, Lucius cleared his throat slightly.

"...May I hear about it in detail?"

"Like I said, isn't it decided that our Chivalric Order has a fixed number of people?"

"Hai"

According to the old legend, the fixed number of people in the Seal Chivalric Order was decided to be 89. To be specific, it utilised all 89 members in the form of placing eight platoons, each with 11 people, under the leader who was the Crown Prince. Vice-Leader Lucius also served as the commanding officer of the first platoon, but substantially, it could be said that he assembled the entire Chivalric Order in the Crown Prince's stead.

In cases where a vacancy arose in these 89 people due to some reasons, there was a structure where an excellent person from among the apprentices that always existed in the dozens would be elected as the new formal member, but that didn't necessarily mean that it (*vacancy*) would be taken up by excellent people in number order. The deciding factor was, plainly speaking, the economic strength and influence of one's home.

For the young nobles of Amaddo, becoming a Seal Chivalric Order's member held a very big significance. If they could join the Chivalric Order, the impressions which the Crown Prince, who was the leader, had of them would improve, and that'd become a foothold in obtaining some sort of post within the royal court in the future.

Desperate nobles who gave large donations to the Chivalric Order and promoted their relatives, who were their sons, grandchildren and younger brothers, for the sake of that were by no means a minority. In contrast, even if they had the abilities, there were people who couldn't become a formal member no matter how much time passed because they didn't have a backer and economic strength.

"Like this, the standard can't be maintained"

Shaking the quill pen, the Crown Prince pouted his lips.

As one would expect, not all members were chosen by whether their donations were large or small, but nevertheless, the amount of donations couldn't be completely disregarded. In a state where the Chivalric Order was cut loose from the army's budget, it was precisely such donations existed that they could live quietly and comfortably free from worldly cares.

"I want the donations, but I also want to improve the standard of the Chivalric Order—what a troubling situation this is, huh?"

"Even if we choose the members by quality only, I believe that will gather donations in its own way though?"

Not all of the young great nobles with large donations were poor-quality members only. In reality, members who fully met all three important conditions of a rich home and the person himself being diligent and talented weren't few.

However, most of the sons and grandchildren of the nobles who gave large donations were in no way chosen based on abilities, and it was also a fact that many times, they were possessors of poor skills. If they disregarded that and tried to choose a member by ability only, nobles who would start saying that they'd stop their donations might appear.

Lucius personally felt that to be able to move at the critical moment without being influenced by the great nobles' ties of obligation was really ideal instead, but Crown Prince Jeffren Isaac's thought seemed to be slightly different.

"We shall gather donations as per up to now, or rather, more than up to now. Even if it's a little, I'd like to weaken the power of the great nobles"

"I understand that thought but..."

"On top of that, we'll raise the standard too. For that, I want to divide it into the First Army and Second Army"

Isaac held out the bundle of documents which was stacked in front and on his right to Lucius. They seemed to be the members' personal information forms that were written at the time of their enrolment. Having just looked over briefly, assuming that he set aside their homes' assets and current statuses, only young men whom Lucius thought were reliable with regard to ability were gathered.

"...This one is the First Army?"

"Un"

"So that means, the thick solid bundle there is—"

"The Second Army. ...Ma, they're for exploitation uses"

Perhaps because the other party was Lucius, Isaac spoke his true thoughts without hesitating. Exploitation uses—namely, members whom he had no

expectation of in terms of ability, but could anticipate funding support from their homes.

"Then, reorganise in the form of those people as the apprentices and these people as the formal members"

"That probably won't work"

Before Lucius had even said everything, Isaac began to speak words of denial.

"Judging from the side that gave money, I'm certain that they will come pestering us to make them into formal members because they've contributed economically. It was like that until now. Originally, "donations" weren't that sort of thing, but maa, I understand their feelings"

"Then, how about we try changing the names of "Apprentices" and "Second Army"? To put it nicely, it's called an image strategy"

"...What's it specifically?"

"The high-standard Chivalric Order which Your Highness wishes for, is a combat force that is also capable of going out to attack in case of emergency, right?"

"Maa, I did say that, but it's such a thing"

"But on the contrary, the current Chivalric Order's duties aren't combat, but mostly things such as attending ceremonies and the like, and being the bodyguards of important people for form's sake"

"...Hahaa"

And then, perhaps he had guessed what Lucius was trying to say, Isaac narrowed his eyes satisfactorily and laughed.

"In other words, dividing it into external and internal sections?"

"Hai. We'll have the external section's combat force manage both sides, but mobilise the internal section during ceremonies only. Objections will surely ensue if you name these people the "Second Army", but if you name both parties like that under the guise of reorganisation, I think the members who are sent to the Second Army and their relatives will preserve their honour..."

"I see... the bonbons who pushed through by the amount of their donations didn't consider going out to places of combat from the start; what they wanted is just the title of the Seal Chivalric Order's member"

"If we fixed the number of people of either section to be 88 each, I believe we can send all the skilled people who are living in obscurity in the apprentices to operating forces now. There may be a need to newly recruit some people though"

"That's good. Since there are about 120 people now, including the apprentices, simply put, the number of members has increased five tenths, and the total amount of donations will also naturally increase"

Isaac clapped his hands and bent forward. Although he was saying things just like a miser, there must be even more separate thoughts collected inside this young schemer's mind.

"—Well then, until the next mission"

"That's impossible"

This time, Lucius spoke to cover the Crown Prince's words.

"For the reorganisation of the organisation, it's necessary to spend time carefully and choose the members; more practically speaking, we must also add a difference that is noticeably understood. ...For example, unless the Second Army makes brand new uniforms"

"How troublesome... on top of that, doesn't this require money again?"

"That may be done one way or the other with donations"

Returning the members' personal information forms to the top of the desk, Lucius added on.

"—For the next mission, let's take along carefully-selected members only for the time being. The official reorganisation will be after that"

"...Ma, it's meaningless even if just the number is big. However, is selecting a few still better?"

Scratching his head with a "pori pori", Isaac breathed out an exaggerated sigh.

"In fact, shouldn't such a thing be done somehow in Chichi-ue's generation? He has a personality that can't tolerate a weak Chivalric Order more than me, you see"

"I heard that His Majesty... didn't have much enthusiasm in the activities of the Seal Chivalric Order in the first place"

Jeffren Isaac's father, Jeffren Francesc, was known to love battles since the time when he was the crown prince. Summoning scholars and soldiers and studying strategies, he personally picked up swordsmanship and was even called the best user of the present age.

Maybe it was because of such a rough disposition, Crown Prince Jeffren Francesc didn't perform his job well as the leader of the Seal Chivalric Order that was useless in combat, and accompanied the army which the late king led, running around the battlefield. If Jeffren Francesc had something that'd approve the existence value of the Seal Chivalric Order, then it might only be the fact that he met Barjor Garido who was an unrivalled comrade in arms that was slightly older than him and subsequently one of Amaddo Four Elder Statesmen.

"...Apparently, it was around the time when my Ojii-sama was the crown prince that the Chivalric Order became a system that operates on donations like now"

Causing the chair to creak, Isaac smiled in somewhat self-derision.

"For the sake of the son, grandchild, and consequently our family, I think the money collection system that cleverly stimulates the nobles' vanity and intensely sucks up donations is certainly implemented well. It was an ingenious plan typical of the 10th generation Jeffren who was called a rare strategist"

Most likely, the 10th generation Jeffren didn't count the Seal Chivalric Order as a war potential from the beginning, and devised it as a method to gradually chip off power from the great nobles to strengthen the royalty. Lucius heard that the previous king, who was already deceased when he started to understand things, was definitely that sort of person.

Pouring the black tea which was slightly over-steamed into a cup and presenting it to the Crown Prince, Lucius switched the topic.

"—By the way, among the personal information forms of the First Army members there, I didn't find Lindegooa-kyou's one..."

Derek Lindegooa had impeccable parentage, character and moreover, ability; in a sense, he was a rare young noble. At the age of 25 this year, he was older than Lucius, but being Lucius's adjutant, he acted as the first platoon's mediator. Hence, even in the Crown Prince's Chivalric Order reorganisation plan, he was a talented person who absolutely must be in the First Army and that it'd be strange if he wasn't.

"Ah, I've to discuss that matter with you"

Placing paperweights made of crystal on both the usable pile and the unusable pile, the Crown Prince stood up. He approached close to the window, next to Lucius, with the cup of black tea in hand.

"—Lindegooa-kyou's Ochichi-ue told me to remove his son from site"

"Why?"

"It looks like he found out the pregnancy of Derek-kun's wife. It's said that his Ochichi-ue intends to transfer the family headship to Derek-kun at the same time as the birth of their child"

"...Was it like that?"

One couldn't join the Seal Chivalric Order unless he was less than 30 years of age and a noble born in Amaddo. There was a regulation that one must leave the group before he welcomed his 30-year-old birthday, be it a formal member or an apprentice. It might be because 20-year-old young nobles gathered and repeatedly went on nothing but pleasure jaunts in the name of manoeuvres which were weakly related to combat that there were voices ridiculing the Chivalric Order as a "noble bonbons (*young sons from affluent families*) close friends club".

When thinking from that aspect, Derek Lindegooa had a deferment of another 5 years, but not just him, most of the members left the group without waiting to be 30. Using the title of the Seal Chivalric Order's member to the maximum, they'd obtain reasonable posts in the royal court or become soldiers, otherwise, they'd succeed family headships—in any case, the young men who had left the

group finally lived as real “adults” from then.

And now, it might mean that the time when Lindegoa-kyou whom Lucius had been relying on became an adult had arrived.

"In that case"

After thinking for a little while, Lucius made a suggestion to the Crown Prince.

"—Let’s have Lindegoa-kyou take on the coordination of the Second Army. Even though they won’t go out to site, it’s impossible for someone who has no self-consciousness and sense of responsibility to unify a group that is close to 100 people"

"Shall we get him to delay his resignation a bit longer until the new system gets on track? ...Since it’s mostly office work, his Ochichi-ue will probably consent to it"

Staring at the scenery outside the window, the Crown Prince, who had taken a deep breath quietly, put the cup on the desk and opened a drawer.

"—And one more thing"

"What’s it?"

"As Lindegoa-kyou is gone, I’ve prepared a candidate to be your adjutant"

"You’re not promoting someone within the group to take his place?"

"At the very least, I’d like to show that the First Army is chosen by prioritising ability to the internal and external sides. ...Though I said that, he’s a child whom an acquaintance requested if I could look after him, you see"

"__"

Lucius, who had received the envelope that was applied with a stately sealing wax, quickly looked over its contents. It seemed that one letter was a personal information form and the other was a letter of introduction.

The name that was written on the personal information form was Angel Saforcada, a 16-year-old who was born in Gruma; his personal history had nothing in particular. Although it was natural that there was no personal history for this age, this was similar to not knowing anything. However, the matter of

being born in Gruma bothered Lucius. If one were to speak of Gruma, then it was also the birthplace of Queen Almudena—the Crown Prince's mother.

"Your Highness, is this perhaps—"

"If you've seen the letter of introduction, then surely you'd understand. ...This is a request from a source that is hard to refuse no matter what"

What was written at the end of the excellent composition which strung together all sorts of flowery words and recommended this youth who was called Angel, was the signature of Almudena's biological father, Berumdes-kou, father-in-law to the current king, Jeffren Francesc, and equivalently the grandfather to Crown Prince Jeffren Isaac. Although there were many members who had huge backing in the Chivalric Order, this youth's backer was extraordinarily great.

Putting the letter back into the envelope and placing it on the desk, Lucius asked.

"My information is limited and I've never heard of the Saforcada House... but what kind of relation does this youth has with Berumdes-kou?"

"I don't know it well either"

"...Ha?"

"Anyway, it has already been decided to allow this child to enrol. —Of course, if you don't agree to it, then I won't let him be the vice-leader and will let him gain experience from being a novice though"

"If... Your Highness has made your decision, then I've no objection"

"If it's the honours student Lucius-kun, he'd say it like way. —However, I can't put people who have no ability beside you. After all, that'd run counter to this very reformation"

"Thank you very much"

It was written in the letter of introduction from Berumdes-kou that as this youth was a possessor of a magic talent which was regrettable to let it be hidden in the countryside, Berumdes-kou hoped that he could be allowed to join the Chivalric Order by all means and be of use to His Highness. Before and

after his daughter became the king's legal wife, Berumdes-kou understood his role and was known by his modesty that was unconnected to arrogant behaviour, thus he shouldn't have let people with insufficient ability into the Chivalric Order by nepotism only, so this youth might certainly have talent.

However, that was precisely why Lucius didn't understand Berumdes-kou's real intention. To begin with, Berumdes-kou was a person who never once recommended even his relatives, much less acquaintances, to the king until now. Why would that old wise man write up a letter of introduction like this for the son of a small noble who completely wasn't talked about in the capital? Exactly what kind of relation was there between Berumdes-kou and the Saforcada House; it was a matter that one would care about even if it wasn't Lucius.

Picking up the cup again, Isaac sipped his tea.

"—Maa, why don't we try to see him first? The person himself said that he'll come here shortly; you can give your judgement after ascertaining how useful he is"

"Acknowledged"

Bowing his head slightly, Lucius secretly sighed.

End of Chapter 1

Chapter 2: She'll Make Progress Too

In the magic superpower, Amaddo, an enormous budget was expended and elementary schools were established in various places to pick out people with magic talents from the whole country.

In these schools where the school expenses for the first two years were free and all the children could attend, their aptitudes as **magic warriors** (*Furigana: Marefikos*) were checked while they studied fundamental reading, writing and arithmetic. Here, the children who might have even a little talent were encouraged to commute to school after their third year and take a more advanced general education and basic magic education. In particular, if they were deemed to have talents, there were cases where they'd transfer to specialised schools after being exempted from school expenses.

Naturally, not all the children had magic talents. Only quite a limited children could finally receive up to the specialised education at the **magic academy** (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*), but as a by-product of this elementary education, the literacy rate of Amaddo was high among its neighbouring countries, surpassing the rest.

As a result, it could be said that this educational system raised Amaddo's national power.

In the afternoon of the very same day, Valeria visited the magic academy's (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*) library.

In Roma where the population's literacy rate was approximately 100%, regardless of them being the national, municipal, or even the private ones that debauched wealthy people built to flaunt, there were many libraries; however, the library which was established on the premises of the magic academy's main institution, setting aside quantity, if speaking in terms of quality, could be said to be the highest even in Amaddo. All the books which were collected here were rare books only, but more than that, books which were impossible to

comprehend unless one had special expertise were collected in great numbers here.

"....."

The other users silently bowed to Valeria who had pulled out several volumes of books from the bookshelf and was going towards the reading room. Even in the magic academy, the title of Dominas was a special thing as expected.

However, Valeria herself broke the silence that the surrounding people took upon themselves to create.

"—Ah"

Valeria raised a slightly idiotic voice because she had noticed Dimitar, who had a sullen expression, was at a bookrest.

Did he also become aware of the other party because of that voice? Dimitar, who had been staring at some sort of gigantic book, raised his face and looked at Valeria.

When Valeria surreptitiously came over to the bookrest, she asked Dimitar in a small muffled voice.

"Hey! Why are you here!?"

"I'm also a magic warrior (*Furigana: Marefikos*). Is it wrong to be here?"

"I don't mean it that way—"

"I've something to investigate"

Glancing at Valeria's hands, Dimitar conversely asked her.

"—What did such a you come here to do?"

"I, I—I've something to investigate too"

Valeria instinctively hid the books that she was holding in her arms. However, this bad-natured Hiera Glaphicos might have seen through Valeria's objective just by glancing at the books' titles.

"...I see"

The mouth of Dimitar who was nodding with a triumphant look curved

upwards.

"W, what's it, that smile?"

"Iya. ...I think you've a good mental attitude"

"Fue?"

Not understanding what Dimitar was saying for a moment, Valeria frowned and asked a question in return.

"You thought of investigating Haiderota before departure, right? That's a good mental attitude. It seems that your self-consciousness has emerged at last"

"...Eh?"

Unable to understand immediately despite it being repeated so, Valeria tilted her head to the side again.

What Valeria had been carrying, were books related to the neighbouring countries' history books and historical geography. They were certainly the things that she thought of investigating Haiderota and then borrowed, though it was just that never in her wildest dreams did she expect Dimitar to praise her for it.

"...What? I didn't intend to say anything strange though"

"Ah, that's not it... it's rare that you'd praise people, so—"

"You're misunderstanding it"

Stroking his neck, Dimitar shook his head.

"It isn't rare that I'd praise people, but simply rare that you'll do things which would be praised by me"

"....."

When she thought he had praised people, this happened at once. Valeria furrowed her brow and pursed her lips indignantly.

"—Be that as it may, I'm not a small-minded person who will find fault with a fellow who did praiseworthy things"

"And yet you're always using a mean way of talking..."

"In the case of the strong-willed you, that way will most likely inspire you and produce a good result"

"...That's an excuse which you thought of just now, isn't it?"

"If you're going to study, then do it quickly. This is a waste of time"

"Don't gloss over it like that!"

Turning her gaze away in a huff, Valeria sat at a bookrest opposite of Dimitar and opened a book.

Considering the flow of time of the other day's tea party, it had probably been decided that Valeria and Karin would head to Haiderota within these few days. It wasn't an expedition where she was entrusted with a top secret mission like thus far; she was told by the king to meet Haiderota's Dominas and assess their abilities.

It wasn't clear what she should do to succeed in this somehow vague mission, but most importantly, Valeria was angry at the matter of Haiderota finding fault with their qualifications.

Therefore, Valeria planned to investigate Haiderota beforehand so that she wouldn't go there and be looked down on. It wasn't particularly because she was told many things by Dimitar in Biranoba, but because she genuinely thought of not wanting to lose to Haiderota's Dominas.

Valeria, who was studying the books quickly and investigating Haiderota's history, its positional relation with Amaddo and its capital, raised her face at a question that had come up suddenly.

Come to think of it, even though Valeria was making rustling sounds of turning over the pages since a while ago, Dimitar completely didn't make the sound of turning over a page.

If she tried to see very carefully, what Dimitar was reading wasn't an ordinary book. Firstly, its size was odd. The binding which greatly protruded from the bookrest had a size that gave one the impression of a washboard; furthermore, gems and luxurious ornaments with gold and silver foils were added onto its

smooth leather cover. It was a book that Valeria, who had used the library here many times, hadn't seen it once so far.

Perhaps he had perceived the gaze of Valeria who was staring fixedly, Dimitar raised his face and muttered.

"...What? Do you still need something?"

"Ah..."

Valeria, who had matched gazes with Dimitar, deliberately lowered her voice and asked.

"I mean, you didn't turn over the page at all since a while ago. What exactly is it that you're reading?"

"This? This is a book that has everything about you written down"

"Hahi?"

Valeria, who had reflexively raised a hysterical voice, hurriedly looked around her surroundings. Maybe they had taken into account her position as a Dominas as one would expect, there were no users who would shout at Valeria, but it could be understood by the atmosphere which had increased its weight somehow that the voice which she had let out had disturbed everyone's reading.

Valeria carried just the chair, went round the bookrest and sat next to Dimitar.

"...So, what's this huge book?"

"Like I said, it's a book that has everything about you written down. To be precise, it may be better to say it's a book that is going to have everything about you written down hereafter"

"...Eh?"

Valeria fixedly stared at the book that Dimitar was reading.

This strongly made book, whose front and back covers, including its binding, seemed to use wood for the core, had a structure that could add pages afterwards, and in fact, its contents were still several pages only. And in the

page that Dimitar had opened, something like a human model spreading both its hands was drawn largely.

Seeing elaborate and complex red lines running zigzag inside that human model, Valeria finally understood the meaning of Dimitar's words.

"Are these perhaps... my magic crests (*Furigana: Hierateika*)...?"

It was definitely a schematic diagram of the magic crests that were carved on Valeria's whole body.

"We Hiera Glaphicos call this "Magic Crests Map (*Furigana: Prano Del Hierateika*)". It's a book that is permitted to be loaned to Hiera Glaphicos only"

Turning over the previous page with a "pirari", Dimitar spoke.

"—These are your magic crests that were altered after you finished the mission in Seriba and then returned. The ones that I were seeing until a while ago were your magic crests after you returned from Biranoba; in order words, they're the newest magic crests. If you look closely, the detailed parts are different, right?"

"Now that you mention it—"

Although Valeria had left the capital twice so far because of her missions, she injured her magic crests at the destinations on both times. When her magic crests were damaged in the course of the mission, even though she'd get the magic academy's Hiera Glaphicos to perfectly restore her magic crests after returning to the capital—she stubbornly wanted Dimitar to do nothing except the stop-gap treatment at the site—in that case, her magic crests would contain small alterations. In fact, when she returned from Biranoba and got her magic crests restored, Murunau-jyoshi (*Ms.*) who did the treatment said that she had slightly altered her old magic crests.



"It'll be made into a map and left behind like this. This is for using it as a

reference when restoring your magic crests from now on"

Returning to the original page, Dimitar gazed at it again. Valeria somehow couldn't help but feel uncomfortable at the seriousness of that gaze.

"H, hey—"

"...What?"

"When it's being stared at like that, something... feels embarrassing though"

"Don't mind it"

"I will!"

"I don't care. Rather, this is also my job"

Dimitar caused his neck to make a "koki koki" sound and took a deep breath.

"Presently, the one who is responsible for the designs and the main restoration of your magic crests is Murunau-jyoshi, right?"

"T, that's right, but...?"

"This is a slightly ominous example, but if Murunau-jyoshi dies suddenly, who'll restore and alter your magic crests?"

"T, that's—"

Murunau-jyoshi was an old woman who served as a Dominas several tens of years ago. After she had retired as a Dominas, she became a Hiera Glaphicos after she finished marrying, giving birth and raising her children; she was a veteran who had roughly 30 years in this field. She was certainly at an age where it wouldn't be strange even if she died at any time.

"They leave behind the Dominas' newest maps in this way so that anyone can become the successor in case of such an unforeseen situation. —And I must also constantly memorise your newest map"

"In case of unforeseen situations," Dimitar added.

"—The least troublesome thing is that I'm responsible for the main restoration and even the alteration after returning to the capital... but you hate that, right? That's why I was at the scene only and requested Murunau-jyoshi to do the alterations"

"I, it's because... it can't be helped if there's a compelling situation—"

If it wasn't an especially urgent situation, getting Murunau-jyoshi to do the restoration was obviously better than getting Dimitar who was a man to do it.

"Ma, since Head Director said it's fine, I guess it doesn't matter in particular. ...Dominas are allowed that much wilfulness"

"...If that's the case, I didn't want to be assigned a male Hiera Glaphicos from the beginning"

When Valeria expressed so in a whisper, Dimitar coldly stared at her,

"Don't make me explain many times. The Hiera Glaphicos who, besides being able to perform the role of your bodyguard, can memorise all your elaborate magic crests, and furthermore, restore them at the destination, is only me. If you feel bitter, blame the fact that Murunau-jyoshi wasn't 30 years younger"

"D, don't say unreasonable things; she's someone who is greatly my senior and yet—"

Valeria, who couldn't raise her voice and had spoken ambiguous words incomprehensibly, suddenly remembered something at that moment and unconsciously clapped her hands together.

"—That's right, there's something that I want to ask you a little"

"Chi..."

Dimitar, who had scowled at Valeria with a "girori" as if to say "I'm working", re-crossed his legs in another direction and sighed exaggeratedly.

"Don't cause trouble for the other users. Just as much as they can't complain to you, I'd probably be blamed. —So, what's it this time?"

"Ano, this—"

For Valeria's "map", it seemed that the left page of the two opposite pages showed the magic crests on her front, and the right page showed the ones on her back. Valeria pointed at the area around her scapula on the right page.

"Hora, isn't there one magic crest that isn't actually used here? What does this exist for?"

"Ah... the contract's mark (*Furigana: Contract*)?"

"Contract's... mark?"

"It's not given such a name officially. However, it appeared that the Hiera Glaphicos called that magic crest on the back of the Dominas that way since the olden days"

"Why?"

"I also don't know the detailed account. They were the proofs of marriage that were exchanged between Redountra and his wives, or rather, I heard they were things with that kind of feeling... but surely Murunau-jyoshi might be more well-informed. You're barking up the wrong tree to have asked me"

Dimitar shrugged his shoulders and continued.

"What I know are at least the facts that there are 12 types of marks on each of the 12 Dominas, and only people who have them are recognised as Dominas and are given special powers by Redountra"

"S, special powers...?"

"It's a mere legend. It's not a magic crest that can actually create such a power"

Dimitar indifferently told Valeria who had unintentionally bent forward.

"—It has no more meaning than that of an ordinary decoration; you know it the best, right?"

"Un"

As the magic crest which was made in the shape of a flower on Valeria's back only shone with a "boya~a" even though she circulated her magic power, it wasn't something that could manifest some sort of magic. That was exactly why Valeria was concerned about what kind of meaning it had.

Closing the gigantic book, Dimitar stood up.

"You're making an expression that seems to say "it's absurd to undergo a painful experience for such a meaningless thing", you know?"

"N— ...honestly speaking, just a little"

"It may be a mere symbol, but nevertheless, I was taught to treat it importantly. Since the olden days, I was told to make that magic crest the top priority if it was damaged. Therefore, it's possible that we've yet to understand it only, and there may be some kind of meaning to that flower"

"I, I see... you're right, that may be the case"

"Or perhaps it's meaningless as expected"

"Which is it!?"

"Be quiet"

"Buguu"

Holding down the mouth of Valeria who had involuntarily raised her voice with a "gashii", Dimitar knitted his brows.

"Don't be conceited because the surroundings took you into consideration and didn't rebuke you. I shall say this without minding it. —Be quiet in the library"

"I, I know"

Valeria, who had thought "it's not imprinted with Dimitar's hand-print by some chance, is it?" and peeked at a hand-mirror and checked her face, returned the borrowed books to the bookshelf and left the library together with Dimitar for some reason or another.

The sun was already setting in the west, and the shadows at their feet were pointing to the east and stretching over a long distance. Passing through the magic academy's quadrangle that was scarce of life, Valeria tried to ask Dimitar while walking in the direction of the main entrance.

"Di... Richternach-kyou, did you hear something about this time's mission?"

"It's because I heard it that I came to memorise your newest magic crests"

"Ah, is that so...?"

"Maa, our destination is Haiderota this time. Though it's Amaddo's rival, it's a country that is related to the alliance. It probably won't become a dangerous situation like so far"

"But I don't understand what kind of girls Haiderota's Dominas are even though I investigated using the books—"

"That's obvious. There's no need to specially go to see them if they are recorded in the books"

"Uguu..."

Having no words to retort, Valeria bit her lips.

"What should I say to counterattack this subordinate who always had a riposte?" When she was pondering one thing or another in the bottom of her seething mind, she came across a carriage which she recognised once she went out the gate.

"—Valeria!"

The one who had emerged looking like he'd tumble down from the carriage was a plump middle-aged man— Valeria's biological father, Borha Costacurta.

"Chii, Chichi-ue—"

Valeria held her mouth down and fleetingly looked at Dimitar.

Did he know from the start, or did he realise it due to Valeria's single word just now? Dimitar was looking at Borha and smiling faintly as if he had guessed something. Sensing an unpleasant premonition somehow, Valeria pushed Dimitar aside and walked to her father.

"Chi, Chichi-ue! Why did you come here?"

"It's for the sake of meeting you and Head Director but—iya, leaving such a matter aside!"

Borha's gaze wasn't directed towards his daughter who was in front of him, but towards Dimitar who was on the other side. Borha had probably guessed that this person was the aforementioned—one whom he had heard nothing but bad rumours of—Dimitar Richternach.

"H, hey! Are, are you that person? That— "

"Chi, Chichi-ue!? What in the world are you—"

"That's enough, so you be quiet! —You're hora, that person, right? Lucius-

dono's relative, ah—, Di, Dimi..."

"No, you've mistaken me for someone else"

"Eh?"

Dimitar nonchalantly told a lie to Borha who had approached him with a "zuzui".

"Well then Your Eminence, please take care in the mission this time too"

Dimitar, who had bowed courteously, also bowed lightly to the stupefied Borha, left the two people behind at that spot and quickly departed.

Borha, who had seen him off, suddenly came to his senses and turned round to his daughter,

"Oo, oi! J, j-j, just now! The young man just now! He's that person, isn't he? I didn't make a mistake, right? That, Dii, Di—"

"Dimitar Richternach"

"Yes, that's it!"

Slapping his gleaming forehead with a "pachin", Borha shouted.

"What's the matter with that youngster! I don't care if he's Lucius-dono's relative or what, b, but to brazenly tell a lie a, and not even greeting me decently—"

"He doesn't have the social obligation to greet Chichi-ue in particular, right?"

"I, I'm the Costacurta House's—"

"You're a commoner who came in as the son-in-law. —Though he lost his parents, he's a person of the respectable Richternach House, you know"

Valeria didn't intend to side with Dimitar. However, if she had to strictly say who was of a higher standing, then Dimitar was probably of an even higher status than her father who had entered the Costacurta House from a mercantile house. If he attended a proper party, Borha must go and greet Dimitar.

"Gununununu...!"

Borha, who had made a flushed face and kept silent, glared fixedly in the

direction that Dimitar left in, but he immediately turned back and headed towards the magic academy's foyer.

"Just a minute, Chichi-ue!"

"Don't stop me, Valeria! I can't tolerate it anymore! I'll appeal directly to Head Director and have that youngster removed from his position as your Hiera Glaphicos!"

"If it's Head Director, then she's at the royal palace. It's unclear when she'll return"

"Ehh...?"

"After all, Head Director doesn't have free time like Chichi-ue"

"It's great that Father and Dimitar didn't grapple in front of the magic academy." Valeria, who had leaked a sigh of relief with a "hoo", boarded the carriage which her father had just gotten off from.

"—In the first place, there's no way that she can dismiss Richternach-kyou because he didn't greet Chichi-ue, right?"

"I, it's not a reason like that; I completely don't think that youngster is suitable to be your Hiera Glaphicos—"

"Even though you don't really know what kind of job Hiera Glaphicos is"

Putting her elbow up onto the window frame and resting her chin in her hand, Valeria grumbled in a whisper, but it didn't seem to have reached her father's ears.

"—Despite his appearance, Richternach-kyou is a person who received words of praise from the Crown Prince. In short, he's a Hiera Glaphicos whom Head Director and the Crown Prince approved. —You seriously want to lodge a complaint against that?"

"I, iya, but"

When Borha, who had boarded the carriage while saying so with heavy breathing in a state where his anger still lingered, instructed the coachman and ordered him to return to the mansion, he folded his arms and deepened the crease on his forehead.

"In the rumour that I heard—"

"He was dismissed from the Chivalric Order?"

"U, umu"

"It's a rumour to the end"

"But it's said that some truths are mixed into rumours too, you know?"

"Like—I—said—, the rumour itself is a rumour that isn't sure what he did specifically, right?"

"Iya, I happened to hear what he did to be dismissed. It's truly a rumour which can't be said very openly though"

Valeria, who was absentmindedly viewing the town at the time of sunset from the gap of the curtain, frowned at the words of her father and turned around.

"...What did he do?"

"Umu. This is something which a certain house's son, who had already left the Chivalric Order, got drunk in alcohol and spoke of carelessly... but it seemed that youngster somehow half-killed three of his colleagues when he was an apprentice of the Chivalric Order"

"....."

If it was Dimitar, he'd most likely succeed in doing something of that extent. It didn't mean that he'd seem to do this, but that it was possible for him to do it. For Dimitar who had grown extremely accustomed to fighting scenes, there was no doubt that he could easily make at least two or three bonbons of the Seal Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Tanpries Aegis*) beyond recovery.

However, there was a very big difference between having such an ability and doing such a thing.

"I feel regretful towards Lucius-dono, but I don't think that youngster is a person who is so decent! If he were a decent young man, he wouldn't have half-killed as many as three young people of good families!"

Seeing the imperious and indignant Borha, an anger which was difficult to suppress filled the inside of Valeria's chest with a "muku muku".

"...Though he's certainly a person who is nothing but arrogant and sarcastic in various ways, he's not a person who will meaninglessly and in addition, one-sidedly exert violence on someone!"

Why is this me saying things to defend Dimitar?—Valeria didn't understand it well either. However, although it was still a short association, it was unpleasant that Dimitar, who had struggled through the boundary between life and death many times together with her, was being criticised by her father who knew nothing of those hardships. It was intolerable. She couldn't forgive it.

"In the first place!"

To her father who had shaken his plump body with a start, Valeria continued further.

"—To look down on Richternach-kyou is to look down on me who is his superior; if there's a person who can speak ill of him, it shall be this me first! At the very least, it's not you!"

"Va, Valeria...?"

She regretted after saying it. It wasn't something that she should have said.

Turning her face away from the gaze of her father who was staring at her in blank amazement, Valeria looked outside the window again.

Anyway, she got angry to this extent.

The girl had times like that when she became intensely ill-humoured.

"It's probably like that just now too." Valeria arbitrarily concluded so for the time being and continued to ignore her father, who had been talking to her timidly, until they arrived at the mansion.



Strong wind with the smell of saltwater flowed in from the open window that faced the balcony.

The slope which faced the sea and came down from the peak of this rocky mountain was levelled into the shape of a huge stairway, and innumerable houses with white walls were standing in a row, clinging to that place. This land, which was placed between a sea at its front and a precipitous cliff at its rear,

was a fort rather than a picturesque scenery.

Attacking it from the cliff's side was impossible, and one had to use ships and send in soldiers from the seaward side to attack, but to reach the castle that was located at the peak of the rocky mountain, one must go up the terrain which was in the shape of a stairway consisting of nine layers. However, it was structured where one must pass through a meandering and narrow hill road to go up one layer of that stairway; moreover, a small watchtower gate would always be placed in the middle of it.

On the hill road where its width was narrow, numerous soldiers couldn't make an assault all at once. In addition, the soldiers who had barely cling to the watchtower gate would be poured with boiling hot water and oil from above before breaking through there and be forced to retreat. There was no army which had crushed nine such obstacles and attacked as far as the peak until now.

An old man, who had went out to the balcony of that impregnable small castle, stared at the sea and narrowed his eyes. Countless small wrinkles which signified the years he had spent were carved on his skin which was tinged with red like that of a Chinese date. Although his age surpassed 50 and was probably close to 60, his physique was excellent. The military uniform with a mantle and the sword, including its scabbard, which was held in his left hand, suited his imposing physique well.

"__"

The old man quietly unsheathed the sword from its scabbard.

"In case of a battle in the sea"

Blocking the sunlight with the sword's blade, the old man muttered.

"...I truly don't think we'll fall behind other countries. However, if it comes to a battle on the land, simple numbers will demonstrate their effectiveness"

"It's as you say"

A young soldier who was standing in the room's corner where the sunlight didn't reach answered the old man's mutter. This person was still young. He was probably in the first half of his twenties at the most.

"With a thing like this... even I'll be able to use magic?"

"It's not omnipotent. You can consider it as one of the convenient tools and weapons to the end"

"...You're really clever"

Shaking his white beard, the old man closed one eye and stared at the blade. On the sword blade that brilliantly reflected the sunlight, some patterns seemed to be faintly carved in bilateral symmetry on either side of the back of the blade.

"However... though it's one of the weapons to the end, if other places are preparing them, we've no choice but to possess the same things too..."

"Though it seems that this sort of thing isn't maintained in Aurillac yet, perhaps in Amaddo, it's something whose research is progressing considerably —"

"Then, that woman is a subordinate of Amaddo?"

"It's difficult to understand to that extent, but"

Straightening the disorder of the white tie that decorated his neck, the man replied after one mora (*a unit of metrical time equal to the duration of a short syllable*).

"—If that woman is a subordinate of Amaddo, even if she came to contact us having some sort of aim, it's a fact that we obtained new weapons"

"Is it... a quantity of the degree where they can be used as weapons on the battlefield...?"

"50 swords and shields, and 80 spears"

"In which case... allocating them to the elite guards and they're finished at best..."

The old man, who had nodded with a long sigh, quietly put the sword back into its scabbard.

"Your Highness"

Lightly brushing his long forelock away, the young man opened his mouth

without a moment's delay.

"—Though we can't catch them in our country very much, it's said that wild pigs are extremely delicious"

"...What?"

"However, it ends there if we finish eating the wild pigs. —If so, what should be done to continue savouring that deliciousness from now on?"

"Cyril..."

The old man looked back at the young man over his shoulder, increased the wrinkles on his mouth and smiled bitterly.

"...You're indeed clever, but because you're clever, everything you say tends to be too exaggerated... that's fine when talking to people and making them understand... but such a manner of speaking is futile on me"

"My apologies"

The young man who was called Cyril bowed politely with a "pishii".

"...I know this is something that goes without saying for His Highness, but then, I'll say it candidly. Even our country ought to mass produce things which are similar to that"

"...Can it be done?"

"Allow me to do it"

"Maa... I can't let our country fall behind Aurillac..."

The old man, who had come back into the room from the balcony, passed the sword to Cyril, arranged his mantle and sat on a sofa.

"—What about Lampitor?"

"She's attending to the preparation for departure. The preparation for the warships can also be done within a few days, but the land route's side will take more time..."

"Fumu... it's her first campaign, huh..."

"I believe there's no need to doubt her ability"

"I'm not doubting that...; however, that woman not only supply weapons like this, but also inform us of Aurillac's activity, and her real motive is unknown... tell everyone not to be negligent even a little bit"

"Hai"

Cyril bowed very deeply to the old man and left the room.

"—The royal prince-denka's permission has been issued"

Passing the sword to the soldier who was waiting outside the room, Cyril ordered in a low voice.

"The swords, shields and spears, send three each respectively to the army's arsenal; send the remaining to the elite guards so that they can master them immediately"

"Acknowledged"

"And prepare a carriage too"

"Are you returning to the capital?"

"If it's just me, I'll return by horse. His Highness is also going back"

Cyril narrowed his eyes while walking in the corridor where its windows were small and wasn't sunny.

"When one has been spending a long time in such a place, any fortitudinous soldier will degrade into an ordinary old man who passes the rest of his life embracing a cat. I don't want His Highness—Oji-ue to become that kind of defeated person"



Within the very same day when Valeria had studied in her hasty preparation, an official letter of appointment came out from the royal palace, and Valeria and Karin's foreign travel to Haiderota was decided. The one who ordered the two people that was Amaddo's king and the Great Official of Gods (*Furigana: Patriarca Mayor*)—the only man who possessed the highest authority in both the world and religion, the 11th generation Jeffren.

Of course, sending two active-service Dominas outside the country at the

same time was unprecedented. It went without saying that their Hiera Glaphicos would follow them; this time, they were expected to take along many attendants as well. It was because this was a respectable national affair, and not a top secret mission where they concealed their social statuses or pretended it was a personal trip.

"Speaking of boring, this is really boring"

Dimitar muttered with a yawn mixed in on the coachman's seat of the carriage.

Five days had already elapsed after receiving the citizens' grand farewell and departing from Roma. The highway going towards the north was well maintained, and if there was no special dangerous place too, there was no land with bad public order either. On top of that, if even the chosen best of the Seal Chivalric Order were attached to the guards, it was probably natural that the journey would be peaceful without troubles. The scenery of nothing but pastures spreading out also caused Dimitar to become drowsy.

Needless to say, Dimitar also wasn't anticipating some sort of trouble, but it was true that he'd have no achievement at this rate.

"Dii—"

Lucius matched the horses' paces and stuck closely to the immediate side of the coachman's seat.

"With the current status like this, we'll somewhat arrive at the border zone soon. Before that, there are various things which I must tell you"

"To me only?"

"I don't have such an intention in particular... but they aren't matters which both Her Eminences have to specially hear"

When Lucius glanced inside the carriage as he gave a small bitter smile, Bettina who was sitting beside Dimitar panicked and started to shake her body.

"Is, is it all right for me to hear the conversation too!?"

"I don't mind in particular, Bettina-jou"

"Ah~, that's great. I was worried since Dimi-san would seem to seriously say

"You're a hindrance so get off the carriage at once and run to follow us."

"...Dii. You'd say such a thing to this Ojou-san?"

Lucius stared at Dimitar with a "jitori". However, Dimitar calmly,

"So, what kind of talk is it exactly, Vice-Leader-dono?"

"Good grief—"

Shrugging his shoulders, Lucius continued.

"...According to the schedule, we'll rendezvous with the "Gale Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Rorudor Rafuale*)" at the border zone, set up camp there and stop for one night"

"Encamping at night, huh... we're still fine, but it's probably a first experience for Our Eminences, you know?"

"Though Haha-ue smiled and said it also wasn't bad that they personally experienced such a thing at least once since they're young, —the arrangement is that we accompany you as guards up to there and return to Roma the next morning. Their Chivalric Order will henceforth act as the guards from there, but the person in charge of guarding our delegation will be you"

"I know"

The purpose of the delegation this time was—outwardly to the end—to visit Aurillac, the capital of Haiderota, and converse with the important people such as its king. Although they were expected to stay in Aurillac for about three days, Valeria and Karin would give things similar to lectures to the girls who were aiming to be a Dominas at the magic academy over there and go on field trips at the facilities in various places during that time; different events were prepared.

Although they also sounded Dimitar, who was a Hiera Glaphicos, out about giving lectures to the Hiera Glaphicos over there as expected, Dimitar pushed it onto Petra. It was because Dimitar believed that his job was to be Valeria and party's guard and to observe Haiderota's current state in detail as well.

"Lucius-samaa"

Bettina, who was attentively listening to the pair's conversation, broke the silence that had suddenly descended upon them and interjected.

"What's the "Gale Chivalric Order" that you spoke of just now?"

"When I thought Our Eminence has finally studied beforehand, there's one more lazy person here too, huh..."

"Oi, stop it. —The Gale Chivalric Order is something similar to what's called the Seal Chivalric Order in our country, Bettina-jou"

Lucius, who was gentle and polite towards anyone, explained to Bettina after chiding Dimitar.

"It was established in the relatively recent years, and—"

"—Vice-Leader!"

Lindegoa-kyou who was galloping his horse came here from the head of the line.

"His Highness is calling for you. As Haiderota's envoy has arrived, he wants to talk together with you"

"Understood. —Then Dii, I'll leave it to you"

"Yeah"

Lucius talked to Valeria and party who were inside the carriage about something and then left together with Lindegoa-kyou. Seeing that figure off, Dimitar sighed.

"—Dimi-san Dimi-san"

"What?"

"Like I said, it's about that something-Chivalric Order"

"Wait a moment. At any rate, I'll get stuck with doing the same explanation from the beginning"

While those words of Dimitar had either ended or hadn't ended, the carriage's window opened and Valeria's voice flew here from within.

"Richternach-kyou!"

"The Gale Chivalric Order is Haiderota's Imperial Guards Chivalric Order"

"Eh?"

"You wanted to hear that, don't you?"

"Ah, un, that's right, but—Lucius-sama said we'll be rendezvousing soon..."

Valeria abruptly showed her face from the space between Dimitar and Bettina. Although her Chivalric Order's colleagues who were attached as guards in the carriage's surroundings looked at Valeria with "Oh!" faces, perhaps because there were no eyes of the general populace, it seemed that the person herself didn't intend to deliberately put on airs.

"—It wasn't recorded like that in the book which I had read though?"

"That's because it was just established a few years ago"

"Is that so?"

"The one who founded the Gale Chivalric Order is the cousin of the current Haiderota's king, and he seems to be a young royalty who serves as the military vice-minister. —Whether it's false or true, it's said that he gathered only warriors who can use sword and magic to compete with our country's Seal Chivalric Order"

"Eh...?"

Valeria knitted her brows and looked up at Dimitar's face.

"But, um... the Seal Chivalric Order, about half are—"

"The nobles' close friend club?"

When Dimitar laughed in what looked to be self-derision somewhat, Valeria now looked around her surroundings. The ones who were protecting this carriage were individuals of that close friend club.

"...Looking at it, it seems that only those guys with excellent skills are chosen and brought along for the mission this time. It appears that His Highness is serious, saying that he'll reform the Chivalric Order"

"But... then, that Gale Chivalric Order too?"

"I wonder about that. —Haiderota is a militarily active country. Though the royalty is controlling it, I don't think they'd go to the trouble of newly establishing a Chivalric Order that is for decoration"

"...Excuse me a little"

"Hey...!"

Karin's face could be fleetingly seen a little next to Valeria.

"Both of you have bad manners, you know. It's rude to turn your bottoms towards me~"

Petra's voice, with a smile mixed in, was heard from inside the carriage. Valeria and Karin were most likely kneeling side-by-side on the carriage's seat. It might certainly be a bad manner that was unbecoming of a Dominas.

"...I heard this from Head Director before, but that Chivalric Order has a Haiderota's Dominas added to it, right; if I remember correctly"

"Dominas?"

"It seems so. It's said that a woman who became a Dominas four, five years ago has considerable ability, and substantially, the Gale Chivalric Order was established due to that person taking advantage of her becoming a Dominas"

"She's a Dominas and yet she fights on battlefields?"

"Ma, it's because that place is, in the first place, always fighting with some places. There's also internal strife, so they can't reunite the divided country too"

It was ridiculous that they'd displace Amaddo in such a state, but it seemed to be true that the aforementioned Dominas was excellent. The vague mission of assessing the scope of Haiderota's power might have nearly the same meaning as probing into the temperament of this Dominas of the armed struggle faction; Dimitar was thinking so.

"She was inaugurated at 16 years old 4 years ago, ...so she's 20 years old this year"

"That Dominas?"

"Yes. Her name is, if I remember correctly..., what's it, I wonder; Richternach-kyou?"

"Diaghilev"

Dimitar brusquely answered Karin's question.

"That's right, Diaghilev-geika. Clotilde Diaghilev"

It seemed that even what Karin, who was of the hard-working prodigy model and the opposite of Valeria, knew about Haiderota's Dominas was to that extent. To put it differently, a Dominas was something like a walking country's secret. Conversely, there was no doubt that Haiderota also hardly held any information regarding Valeria and Karin. What they might understand at best was that both of them were born in old families and had outstanding talents since childhood—information like this which would apply to the majority of girls who became Dominas.

At that moment, the horsemen who were crowding in front of the carriage split to the left and right neatly.

"Richternach-kyou!"

Lindegoa-kyou could be seen galloping his horse and coming this way. Dimitar gestured to Valeria and party to withdraw with his hands behind his back and straightened his loose collar.

"—Please advance slowly to the front as it is. His Highness and Sigibert-kakka from Haiderota are waiting for you"

"Understood"

Dimitar was hated by the bonbons of the Seal Chivalric Order, and because of that, he didn't think pleasantly of them either, but Lindegoa-kyou who acted as Lucius's adjutant was one of the few exceptions. He respected the younger Lucius well and also justly evaluated the matter of Dimitar in his apprentice days. Although Dimitar heard that he was leaving the Chivalric Order soon, it was a regret for Dimitar that Lucius's reassuring allies were decreasing.

"Nee..."

Opening the window which was right behind the coachman's seat slightly, Valeria let her face be seen a little again.

"Who's Sigibert-kakka?"

"He's the military vice-minister who founded the Gale Chivalric Order. ...He's

probably the leader in name only though"

"Isn't that like Isaac-denka somehow?"

"It is"

"Eh?"

"It's undoubtedly that. ...The number-one motive that the Vice-Minister-kakka founded the Gale Chivalric Order was because that man seems to possess a strange sense of rivalry towards Our Highness somehow"

"Is, is that so?"

"—I heard it so from Lucius. Ma, you'll probably understand when you see the actual person"

When they advanced for a while on a road where both its sides were firmly guarded by the Chivalric Order, a group which was dressed in uniforms that were obviously a different type from those of Amaddo was waiting with their horses' necks lined up in a row. Innumerable tents were put up in the rear. It was probably Haiderota's Gale Chivalric Order that came to receive Valeria and party.

"...Feign innocence well"

Dimitar warned Valeria who was inside the carriage while closing the window. The one whom Valeria and party were meeting after this was a royalty of a rival country. Dimitar couldn't think that the other party would laugh and not fuss over it even if there was more or less impoliteness like his motherland's important people. Rather, he might condemn their impoliteness when it counted.

Dimitar, who had stopped the carriage, jumped off the coachman's seat and prepared a small stepladder.

There, the Crown Prince who had dismounted his horse came to him.

"Richternach-kyou"

"Ha"

"You don't have to open it yet"

The Crown Prince floated a smile that was cold in some respects and told Dimitar, who had put his hand on the carriage's door, so.

"It's not the appearance of both Her Eminences yet"

"....."

Dimitar who had followed the Crown Prince's line of sight over his shoulder guessed the reason somehow. Despite all of the Seal Chivalric Order dismounting their horses and waiting in a posture of standing at attention for Valeria and Karin to appear—despite even the Crown Prince dismounting his horse—the Gale Chivalric Order's people were still straddling their horses.

"...They're really a rude bunch"

When Dimitar stated in a whisper, the Crown Prince smiled and,

"Rather than being rude, Sigibert truthfully isn't attentive to small details. And when the leader doesn't dismount his horse, the other members can't dismount of their own accords; hence it can't be helped that everyone is waiting like that doing nothing"

"I see"

"If their Vice-Leader is capable like us, she should be advising him any time now, but—"

When Dimitar and the Crown Prince were guessing the situation, a woman who was mounting a horse next to a young man, who was acting self-important in the centre, talked to him about something.

"...Hee, is that person the rumoured Vice-Leader?"

Maybe he had received the pointing out of the long-haired female member, the young man lightly waved his riding crop and dismounted. The other members also followed that and dismounted their horses in succession.

"May I, Your Highness?"

"Yes, if you please, Dii-kun"

Prompted by the Crown Prince who had taken off his hat, Dimitar pulled open the carriage's door.

However, the key Valeria didn't alight. When Dimitar who was kneeling down on one knee near the small stepladder looked up fleetingly, he made eye contact with Valeria who had a perplexed countenance.

"...What are you doing?"

"C, can I alight? Isn't there detailed regulations like a sequential order?"

Considering that it was this Her Eminence, she noticed the subtle parts well.

"There's no strict regulations, but in terms of hierarchy, you're the first. Next is Rudbeck-geika, and last is glasses (*Petra*). ...Since the other side is standing in a row and observing us, grandly throw out your chest and make your appearance. You're carrying the country on your shoulders, so don't be belittled"

When Dimitar advised in a whisper, perhaps a fighting spirit entered her because of that, Valeria's expression changed.

"—Saa, your hand please, Your Eminence"

Taking the hand that the Crown Prince had extended, Valeria slowly alighted from the carriage. Once she had resolved herself, Valeria who was by nature strong-willed and brave had never been timid. She probably seemed to have appeared calmly and full of dignity to the Gale Chivalric Order's people who were arrayed there.

Escorting Valeria and Karin, the Crown Prince walked towards the Gale Chivalric Order. Continuing afterwards were both Her Eminences' Hiera Glaphicos, Dimitar and Petra, and Lucius as well.

"—The one who issued instructions to everyone just now is Sigibert Duevrekakka, and the one who talked to His Excellency is the vice-leader, Diaghilev-geika"

It was uncertain who Lucius was muttering to. His words were most likely directed to Valeria and party.

"She's a Dominas and moreover, the vice-leader? That's really amazing"

The Crown Prince responded like he was joking in some respects.

"—Maa, we also have Lucius-kun serving as the vice-leader, so it might be

inevitable that an extraordinarily capable adjutant accompanies an incompetent top (トツプ; *people who are at the apex of the hierarchy*)"

"If I may say it this way... there's a world of difference between Your Highness and Duevre-kakka"

It was rare that Lucius would make a remark that disparaged somebody and praised the Crown Prince. It was because Lucius was fundamentally a person who didn't particularly flatter influential people.

Since that Lucius went as far as to compare him with the Crown Prince, His Excellency over there was probably a great man.

"—Yaa, Isaac"

The young man who had greeted the party of Amaddo's Crown Prince Isaac and Dominas—the Gale Chivalric Order's leader, Sigibert, gently brushed aside his glossy long hair and held out his right hand.

"I'm the Crown Prince of Amaddo. You should add "denka" when you address me, right, Sigibert-kun?"

Grasping Sigibert's right hand back, the Crown Prince snorted slightly.

Sigibert, who was a handsome man who didn't look completely inferior even if he was side-by-side with Isaac, shook his thin eyebrows with a "hikuu". He probably felt slightly angry at Isaac's reply just now.

"...Then you should also call me "Your Excellency" or "Your Highness", Isaac-denka"

"I'm the first heir to the throne of Amaddo. As opposed to me, though you're the cousin-dono of His Majesty the King of Haiderota—eto, what number is it again, your inheritance position to the throne? Seventh? Or is it eighth?"

"It's the fifth position! You make the same mistake every time we meet!? It's totally on purpose; it's on purpose, right; you're making the mistake on purpose, aren't you!?"

"That's rude. It's not particularly on purpose though. ...Even so, your phraseology is so repetitious as ever"

Isaac nonchalantly smiled at Sigibert who had become enraged with a "kuwaa

(*blood rising to the head*)” and shaken his hand free.

—"But you see, in the end, your importance is to that degree inside of me, Sigibert-kun. It's to the degree where I've even forgotten what kind of face you have until we meet again like this"

"What!? If it's the case, even I didn't remember your face! I didn't remember it even in the slightest! Ah, I don't remember; I certainly didn't remember!"

"There's no need to look down on your own memory to that extent, right, Sigibert-kun? At least you were able to say my name without making a mistake, you see. ...Ma, you might not be able to write even its spelling though"

"Youu... y, y-y, y, y, facing someone who is older, y, you you—"

The white skin of Sigibert who appeared really noble flushed with a "ka~a". It seemed that the riding crop which he held in his hand would break at any time.

Dimitar, who was watching the conversation of His Highness and His Excellency nearby, comprehended the meaning of Lucius's words from some time ago and desperately endured the smile which seemed to leak out unconsciously. This Sigibert-kakka was certainly a person who could be called great.

Anyway, he was childish.

Although Isaac was also seen as quite a childish young master by the citizens, Isaac's childishness was a means of self-effacement. With just the sly schemer manipulating the surroundings with his childish speech and conduct and then enjoying himself, Dimitar concluded that Isaac's true colours wasn't a child to that extent.

However, this His Excellency was a child more than his actual age, the opposite of Isaac. He seemed to easily get angry and lose his composure due to Isaac's provocations, and each and every of his replies was also kid-like. Apparently, these two people had been acquaintances since the past, but indeed, if it was this Sigibert-kakka, it wasn't odd even if he thought of creating a Chivalric Order that was above the Seal Chivalric Order because of his sense of rivalry towards Isaac.

As the figure of Sigibert being easily dealt with by Isaac and then making his

face bright red was to the extent that Dimitar looked like he'd burst into laughter, it should have an even more destructive power to Valeria and party. The fact that Valeria had been looking downwards fixedly since some time ago wasn't because she was feeling a sense of augustness regarding the other country's royalty, but probably because she was enduring the matter of bursting into laughter.

Dimitar curved his lips and quietly whispered to Valeria from the back.

"That's great. It seems that His Excellency is used to some impoliteness. — What's more problematic than that is the Vice-Leader who is giving a dreadful stare at the back"

"Eh?"

Valeria, who had suddenly raised her face at those words, averted her gaze immediately and looked back at Dimitar.

"Just, just now, I met her eyes directly from the front somehow, but...?"

"Oi, to be overwhelmed all of a sudden, what are you going to do?"

"...She has been staring intensely at you since some time ago"

Karin smoothly added as she faced the front.

"Why is she staring intensely at me!? Even though this is our first meeting—"

"It's because this is the first meeting, I guess. She probably wants to see what kind of person the Amaddo's Dominas whom she heard about in rumours is. Ma, I won't tell you to stare intensely back, but stop quailing and averting your eyes. I said "don't be belittled", right?"

Lightly poking Valeria's back, Dimitar stared at that woman once again.



Clotilde Diaghilev—there was no doubt that she was most likely the

Haiderota's Dominas who was called so. Although being a possessor of a beauty which left a deep impression at first sight was natural as a Dominas's requirement, it was especially striking in her case. She had white skin that should be precisely compared to "white", pale-gold-coloured eyes and long silver hair. She also had splendid body's lines which were clear even from above her military uniform, long, slender and well-proportioned limbs—a magnificently symmetrical beauty, but that also felt like a beauty which made one associated it with an artificial product in some respects.

Clotilde, who had been staring at Valeria fixedly, gently pulled the mantle of Sigibert who was groaning with a "Mugigi...!",

"Your Excellency. I feel it's logical to receive everyone first"

"I know, right? You also haven't greeted both Her Eminences from our side yet"

"Muguu... mu... w, whatever! I shall pardon your impoliteness despite my reluctance to do so; that's right, I shall forgive you!"

Sigibert, who had desperately suppressed the matter of being about to erupt again at Isaac's additional attacks and spat out his anger quietly, made a brilliant smile in an instant, lightly pushed Isaac away and knelt down on one knee in front of Valeria and Karin.

"I'm sorry that my greeting is late. I'm Sigibert Duevre who serve as Haiderota's military vice-minister and the Gale Chivalric Order's leader... pleased to make your acquaintance hereafter"

"T, thank you very much for your polite greeting. I'm called Valeria Costacurta, Your Excellency"

"I'm Karin Rudbeck, Your Excellency. It's an honour to have received the invitation"

The slightly unreliable Valeria and the completely perfect Karin; when each of them had exchanged greetings with Sigibert, Isaac introduced Lucius and the rest, looking languid and as if he was making a supplement.

"E—to nee, this person is my adjutant, Lucius Richternach-kyou, and beside him is Costacurta-geika's exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, Dimitar Richternach-kyou.

And further next to him is Rudbeck-geika's exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, —e—to, Pe, Pe...?"

"It's Petra"

"That's right, Petra Rudbeck-kyou. There's one more very small child, but I'll introduce her at another opportunity again"

"Fumu"

Sigibert, who had stood up, folded his arms with an exaggeration that was pompous in some respects and looked at Dimitar and Lucius.

"When you said "Richternach", ...it's the "Witch of Sunlight's"?"

"She's my mother. ...Dimitar here is my second cousin"

Lucius replied courteously.

"I see... considering that it's you, you've gathered quite good and talented people, haven't you, Isaac? After all, the things that are needed in the royal family's Imperial Guards Chivalric Order are firstly, pedigree; the second is appearance"

"I didn't hear your explanation or the like in particular. It's second-hand knowledge from someone anyway, right? More importantly, quickly introduce Her Eminence there"

"...You forced people to call you "His Highness" and yet you're really lenient towards yourself who doesn't know manners"

Sigibert, who had grumbled in a whisper, looked back at Clotilde and extended his hand.

"You might have understand this already, but she's indeed the Dominas whom our Haiderota is proud of, Clotilde Diaghilev-geika who is extolled as "White Rose of Steel""

"White Rose" might be a perfectly appropriate sobriquet. One would certainly be injured if he carelessly touched it. Somehow, this Dominas had a scariness which was similar to that of a drawn sword.

"I'm called Clotilde Diaghilev. Welcome to Haiderota. I welcome you"

Lightly bowing to the party from Amaddo, Clotilde spoke laconically. Although it didn't mean that she was rude, she was evidently unsociable. It seemed that she didn't intend to even make and show a smile to state guests from the neighbouring country.

"I heard that there's another Dominas in your country though"

When Isaac asked Clotilde so, Sigibert shook his cheeks with a "hikuu". He probably became angry again that Isaac, who had given him such a rude reception, was behaving properly towards Clotilde.

"...Malena Puyol-geika is doing the preparations to receive everyone"

Clotilde answered this in few words again. Although Karin was also a girl who was cold, indifferent and bereft of emotional expressions, Clotilde's coldness went above that. One would think it was the result of disciplining herself in order not to show her emotions on the outside to the utmost, but setting aside the reason, if she could continue to be like this around the clock, then she was surely a possessor of considerable willpower.

"—Then, everyone, this way please"

Leaving Sigibert as he was, Clotilde guided the party and started walking.

Chapter 3: Suggestion in the Rain

Haiderota, which was 1 of the 12 countries when the “**Holy Alliance** (*Furigana: Riga Santourear*)” came into existence and presently boasted the second-place national power among its allies, was a militaristic superpower that was steadily pressing forward its military expansion in order to unseat Amaddo from the position of the leading power, though it didn’t make the declaration as one would expect.

Geographically facing the sea in the north, Haiderota could be said to be the continent’s best in naval strength already, but on the other hand, it was limited in ore resources such as iron ore and coal. It was simply too much to cover the ore resources that were necessary to not only manufacture swords, armours and helmets, but to also construct warships with just its domestic production output.

From the fact that Haiderota appropriated an enormous military budget like every year and forced that burden onto its people in the form of tax, its worldly matters were constantly unstable.

However, the antagonistic attitude towards Amaddo wasn’t entirely the only reason for Haiderota being zealous in the augment of its armaments to that degree.

Truthfully, she had been worrying about whether she could properly greet nobles from another country, but it seemed that she was able to successfully pull through it somehow. Putting her hand against the chest of her tabard, Valeria leaked a sigh of relief with a “hoo”.

“...Setting aside that His Excellency, Diaghilev-geika looks quite formidable”

Karin who was beside her whispered in a low voice. Although Clotilde was certainly punctilious and polite in her demeanour and speech, it made them feel an invisible thorn. Especially in the looks that she occasionally gave Valeria and Karin, an emotion which was hard to say was amicable was obviously mixed

in.

"Nevertheless... why is she the only one who isn't wearing a pair of trousers?"

Staring at Clotilde's figure from behind, Valeria tilted her head to the side.

Every member of the Gale Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Rorudor Rafuale*) below its leader, Sigibert, was wearing a military cap and uniform with identical design lines. They most likely signified the difference in position within the group; basically, one could say that everyone wore the same uniform.

And Clotilde was fundamentally wearing that uniform too.

However, she was wearing a military cap and jacket only. Her bottom, which was covered by clothing that seemed to be white undergarment, could be seen every now and then since a little while ago through the shirttail, which split into two like a shallow's tail, at the back of the uniform. Although she had properly put on boots, her thighs were almost completely visible.

"...Put your imagination to work a little"

Perhaps he heard the conversation of Valeria and Karin, Dimitar interrupted.

"If you take off the tabard as well, you'll be in a shameless appearance that isn't much different to that though"

"It's not shameless! That's the proud uniform of Amaddo's Dominas! To begin with, we're lightly dressed so that we can use our magic immediately at the critical moment—ah, I see"

The skin exposure of a Dominas was a lot was because large quantity of magic crests (*Furigana: Hierateika*) to that extent were carved onto her skin. In that case, it might be because magic crests were carved there and so that she could use them immediately at the critical moment that Clotilde was exposing her thighs that way too.

"....."

Maybe Karin had guessed it from the beginning, she didn't have the look of being surprised or impressed in particular. Valeria felt embarrassed somehow and tried to relax her limbs which had grown stiff due to the long trip in a carriage while taking deep breaths greatly.

"...Hey"

Realising that Dimitar was fixedly staring at Clotilde's bottom, Valeria narrowed her eyes.

"Aren't you looking at it too much?"

"Looking at what?"

""What", you say... like I said, hora"

"Surely you're not thinking that I'm looking at that woman's bottom or something, are you?"

"Y, you aren't?"

"Not her bottom; it's her thighs"

"I don't want you to put on airs! There's not much difference, right!?"

Dimitar threw a cold look to Valeria who had lowered her voice and screamed.

"...You're fundamentally misunderstanding something"

"W, what's it!?"

"On the whole, there shouldn't be magic crests carved onto your bottom, no?"

"Baa..."

Of all things, what did he start to say in front of Lucius? Valeria wanted to give an unsparing round of applause to her reason that somehow endured slapping Dimitar.

However, Dimitar continued indifferently, unconcerned about Valeria's anger.

"That's why I'm saying you're misunderstanding it. ...I'm looking at her thighs fixedly is because I'm anticipating "Won't her magic crests emerge by some chance?". Even if I gaze at her bottom, magic crests aren't carved on it anyway"

Magic crests were carved onto the whole body of a Dominas—that was true to a certain extent, but it didn't mean that her entire body really had them. As Dimitar had said, Valeria also didn't put magic crests on delicate areas like her

breasts and bottom. Such circumstances were probably the same even in Haiderota.

Valeria arranged her breathing and then enquired after clearing her throat slightly.

"...In, in other words, Richternach-kyou wants to say that you're observing her because of your sense of duty as a Hiera Glaphicos? That you're interested in the magic crests of another country's Dominas?"

"Ma, it's not only that, I guess. Individually speaking, bottoms that are a bit bigger are"

"Dii"

Lucius interrupted the words of a grinning Dimitar midway. It seemed that Lucius, as one would expect, understood well the topics that were fine to talk about and topics that weren't in a situation like this.

"...From what I heard, she's a Dominas whose forte is extremely offensive magic; going to missions such as international border disputes and subjugation of thieves, she's said to have rendered military exploits many times. She's practically a female soldier rather than a Dominas"

Perhaps he wanted to change the topic, Lucius talked to Valeria and party about Clotilde. If she was a possessor of a personal history which was so spectacular, they could certainly agree with the fact of her being called by an impressive second name such as "White Rose of Steel" too.

On the map, this prairie where the Gale Chivalric Order had set up camp seemed to be Haiderota's territory already. Valeria who was sitting in the carriage completely didn't know when they had crossed the national border.

At the circumference of the camp where innumerable large tents were put up, members of the Gale Chivalric Order were getting ready for the evening and running about in preparation for encamping at night. Meanwhile, all of the Seal Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Tanpries Aegis*) which had just arrived a short time ago were also starting the work of putting up tents. When watching them like this, it looked like the Seal Chivalric Order and the Gale Chivalric Order didn't have much difference, but perhaps, between His Highness and His Excellency

who were unfolding an exchange of sarcasm, there were great conflicting opinions in that perception.

"It'll take a bit longer until our meals. Please have these beverages first"

An assembly-type table was placed in front of a conspicuously large tent, and wine and fruits were already lay out on it.

At that table, a girl was pouring wine into a tin tankard and wandering around, humming a tune. All in all, even though it should be the same style as Clotilde's, it might be because she was a little plump that it didn't look like she was wearing a similar uniform. Perhaps she'd be called a charming beautiful girl; the back figure that was moving around with small, quick steps gave one an impression of a stuffed toy bear in some respects.

Valeria stared in amazement and secretly whispered into Karin's ear.

"...Nee, is she perhaps—"

"That seems to be the case"

From the look of it, there were no other women in this Chivalric Order. Hence, it meant that the girl, who had a same appearance as Clotilde, was probably the other Dominas who belonged to this Chivalric Order.

Maybe she didn't notice the party that had turned up yet, the girl picked up a bright red apple which was served in a bowl and began biting it with a "shaku shaku". Moreover, munching roasted amandes (*almonds*) and licking marmelos (*quinces*) which were dipped in honey, she occasionally snatched the dining table's delicacies.

Clotilde gave an unnatural cough after breathing out a big sigh.

"—Ahh!?"

And then, perhaps she had finally perceived the arrival of the guests, the girl hurriedly held her military cap under her arm and gave a military-style salute with a snap.

"T, thank you for your hard work! I, I'm Malena Puyol! I serve as the assistant of Haiderota Gale Chivalric Order's vice-leader!"

Although her words were exaggerated, it was comical that "Mugugu"or

something like that was sometimes mixed into them. In any case, just the fact that she wasn't used to such situations was well understood. She was probably still a newcomer, though this wasn't something that could be said in Valeria's standpoint. One would feel relieved somehow when seeing her still chewing her food.

"I feel like I can get along well with this child..."

"Is it because it feels like you're seeing the same kind?"

"I wouldn't act suspiciously to that extent as expected"

Counterattacking Dimitar's sarcasm in a low voice, Valeria sat down on a chair that was offered by Sigibert. Sigibert and Isaac sat at both ends of the long table facing each other, and two Dominas were at both their sides. The Amaddo's Hiera Glaphicos were given seats next to them and then took their seats. Only Lucius—as if it was his duty—was standing nearby Isaac.

"—Well then"

As soon as he sat on his seat, Sigibert opened his mouth.

"We'll spend the night here as it is today; tomorrow morning, we'll depart towards our capital, Aurillac, but I'd like Isaac-denka and the gentlemen of the Seal Chivalric Order to return to Roma as it is. Please leave the escorting of both Her Eminences from here on to the Gale Chivalric Order"

"I've no doubt in the abilities of both Her Eminences, Diaghilev and Puyol, but regrettably, you're the one who consolidate the Chivalric Order"

Chewing the amandes with a "pori pori", Isaac smiled thinly.

"—At least, I'd like you to present a security system that we can agree to. To begin with, how do you plan to take them to Aurillac? It's an international problem if something happen to our Ojou-samas, you know?"

"Be at ease"

Sigibert waved his riding crop with a "pii" and smiled confidently at Isaac's head-on sarcasm.

"—Our Haiderota army is the king's army. Therefore, I'm thinking about making it into an appropriate journey. This is also an excellent opportunity to

make known the dignity and authority of our Dominas and the Gale Chivalric Order to the people along the way"

"Setting aside the matter of what's a king in your country, in other words, it means that you're parading to Aurillac?"

"To say it so that it's easy for you to understand, it's like that"

Sigibert lifted up his tankard of wine and looked at Clotilde who was beside him.

"—Even just recently, our Dominas, Diaghilev-geika, personally just led the army and exterminated a group of robbers. There are many people who wish to catch a glimpse of her. Besides, the public sentiments will settle down by doing so as well. This is also called “politics”, but... Isaac, do you not understand, I wonder? You don't understand, right; you surely won't understand"

"Call me “Your Highness”, Sigibert-kun"

Sighing as if he was astounded by him, Isaac put down his tankard.

"...In the first place, there's no need to get three of Her Eminences to take the trouble to appear to capture thieves in our country, and there's also no need to have a parade to dispel the dissatisfaction of the people who suffer from heavy taxation. Even if we're told to understand the circumstances of your country in spite of the big difference in the public order levels, that's impossible"

"Muguu...!"

Sigibert's face began to turn red again. Even though the person himself intended to make Clotilde's bravery and reliability appealing, he was probably frustrated that he had conversely ended up pointing out the poorness of the internal public order.

As Orvieto had said not long ago, Haiderota was a country that put its military expansion first and its people second; it seemed that those people who held dissatisfaction immediately carried out armed uprising and became groups of robbers. Therefore, the fact that Isaac interfered in this and that regarding the journey's escort—even if the side of pestering Sigibert existed considerably—was very reasonable.

"Your concern is unnecessary"

Taking over Sigibert who was biting his lips with a "Ginuu...", Clotilde spoke.

"Our country's public order hasn't been so poor in the recent years either. ... However, we're only severely conducting crackdowns especially of late due to the thought of His Majesty who wants to make the country difficult for criminals to live in. Besides, if in the unlikely event that thieves obstruct our journey, I'll show you this me cutting them down personally"

"Iya—, you're really courageous. Diaghilev-geika is a Dominas of the type that we don't have"

Brazenly clapping his hands with a "pachi pachi", Isaac shifted his gaze to-and-fro between Sigibert and Clotilde several times.

"—If Your Eminence is saying to that extent, I've nothing to say. In fact, the one whom we should depend on when something happens isn't Sigibert-kun, but Diaghilev-geika. His words couldn't put me at ease, but since Your Eminence said so, there's no doubt about it"

"W, why are you saying such—"

Just when Sigibert was about to half-rise to his feet, plates of cuisine which smelled good were carried here. Green peas potage, partridge roast and frumenty containing venison—all of them were very exquisite cuisine as dinner on the ground of a night camp.

Plates were lined up one by one before Isaac and then he spoke to Lucius.

"—Is it about time that our tents are also finished being put up? Lucius-kun, you'll instruct everyone and get them to finish their meals"

"Hai"

Bowing politely, Lucius left. Although it was a disappointment for Valeria, so long as Isaac ate here, Lucius must look after the Chivalric Order.

"Your Highness"

Dimitar suddenly stood up.

"I'd like to give the instructions for hereafter to Bettina-jou, but may I?"

"Ah— ...that's right. Since that child will definitely feel helpless by herself, go and see her situation just a little"

"Understood. —In that case, I'll be leaving"

Dimitar also bowed politely and left the dinner's dining table.

However, Valeria didn't think that he'd straightforwardly disappear because of Bettina. Although she didn't have a definite reason, she somehow understood from the short association with Dimitar thus far that when he purposely spoke like that, his real aim lay in another place.



Running at a trot in the camp that was ruled by a restless atmosphere due to the preparation for dinner, Dimitar caught up with Lucius.

"—What do you think, Lucius?"

"About what?"

"Those people intend to head for Aurillac with the mood of a parade, you know"

"In a country where the populace's dissatisfaction towards the government is becoming chronic, the royalty will make a round of visits to every place in the form of "imperial tour" and make the will of the people settle down. It's a common move"

"Speaking of typical of this country where political situation is unstable, this is so like them"

Dimitar looked around his surroundings while walking side-by-side with Lucius. Although the people from the Seal Chivalric Order weren't non-existent, the ones who were moving around in the vicinity were mostly the Gale Chivalric Order, namely Haiderota's people only. It wasn't possible to say remarks which might be interpreted as criticism towards Haiderota openly very much.

Perhaps he was aware of that, Lucius's voice was also extremely low.

"...To be honest, the effect is doubtful with just Sigibert-kakka, but if it's that Diaghilev-geika, the populace's support can be obtained. For a country of warriors like Haiderota, a Dominas who stands at the army's vanguard and

fighters is considered more of a hero than an unskilful soldier"

"I understand that. —However, they plan to involve even Our Eminences in that monkey show, you know?"

The Gale Chivalric Order probably intended to push its vice-leader, Clotilde, rather than its leader, Sigibert, to the front, assemble a brave file of troops and go towards Aurillac. Valeria and Karin would then be shaken in the carriage, with the appearance of being protected by them.

But in that case, Valeria and party might become appendages to Clotilde. The leader of the alliance was, to the end, Amaddo; Dimitar believed that the situation where the leader country's Dominas were eclipsed by another country's Dominas should be avoided.

"...That Dominas has the height and her appearance is eye-catching too. With those, she'll inevitably stand out if she straddles an ostentatiously decorated horse. Unless they (*Valeria and Karin*) also dress up very strikingly and show their faces, the leading part of the parade will be taken by that woman as things are, you know"

"Is that situation so bad?"

"...What?"

Noticing Lucius who was staring at him and smiling bitterly, Dimitar who had asked so in return narrowed his eyes.

"What do you mean? That's definitely bad, right?"

"It's better if it's in Amaddo; this place is Haiderota, you know? As expected, it's impossible that both Her Eminences of our country disregard Diaghilev-geika and play the leading part in the home town of the other party"

"Even so"

Dimitar knitted his brows and then folded his arms.

"—I can't tolerate our country's Dominas being treated like those people's extras"

"This is unexpected, Dii. You've that much patriotism"

"It isn't patriotism in particular. I'm merely not pleased with those people's way of doing things only"

"Is that so? Maa, it's a good inclination either way. Whatever your reason may be, the fact that you're thinking about Valeria-jou's position like that means"

"Of course. This is related to my success in life"

Dimitar felt as if there was an implication somewhere in Lucius's manner of speaking and was in no way comfortable. Even though Dimitar had been worrying about this and that purely because of political reasons, Lucius was reading too much into such a matter of his own accord. For Dimitar, things had turned out contrary to his actual wish.

"Look here, Lucius—"

"You don't need to worry so"

Lucius interrupted Dimitar's words and hit the area around his upper arm with a "pon".

"His Highness had foreseen that it might become a situation like this from the beginning. Upon discussing with Haha-ue, a plan has been prepared properly"

"A plan? Is that true?"

"Yes. It has been factored in that the other side will start something. After all, it's said that the person called Sigibert-kakka has a rivalry spirit towards His Highness one way or another since he was a child. No matter what kind of trivial thing it is, he'll compete with His Highness and try to win. ...But regrettably, he seems slightly simple and ignorant of the ways of the world to compete with His Highness"

"I knew that he's simple and childish once I saw him..."

"Anyway, things won't turn out as those people want"

"Is that so..."

Although Dimitar didn't know what kind of plan His Highness had worked out exactly, he probably didn't have to worry since Lucius stamped his seal of approval.

"—What? Did you go out of your way to leave the dinner party just for that reason, Dii?"

"Iya, I remembered that I left Gacha Pink alone"

"If it's Bettina-jou, she should be helping to put up both Her Eminences' tents, most likely at the instruction of Lindegua-kyou's side, but..."

"I see. Then, I'll go and help a little. ...I want to give her a warning"

"A warning?"

"Even if we're in an ally's territory, her armour is a mass of military secret. I should have said that to her on the occasion of a mission, but she's simply lacking the awareness. Even though she has nothing to do, she'll wander aimlessly at once and act in a behaviour that will attract people's attention"

"Now that you mentioned it... I recalled something"

Lucius, who was walking side-by-side with Dimitar, stopped suddenly and scratched his head.

"I've also forgotten to convey a few words to His Highness"

"What's it? Is it about Jorkera by any chance?"

"Yes... it's about His Highness; he might see a suitable time and boast of the new sword to Sigibert-kakka. Sigibert-kakka is a gentleman who can't use magic too, so this is a perfect opportunity to make him feel bitter, right?"

It seemed to be something that mischievous His Highness would really do. If it was to make Sigibert who would try to compete with him on everything stamped his feet, he'd probably flaunt one or two military secrets nonchalantly.

"Dii, return immediately and convey this matter to His Highness. I'll talk to Bettina-jou myself"

"Understood"

"And one more thing"

"?"

"You probably have thoughts regarding Diaghilev-geika, but don't show it in your attitude, all right?"

"Those are words which you should say to Our Eminence"

Setting Karin aside, Valeria who was ignorant of the world's severity and malice most likely hadn't notice the scheme of Haiderota's side yet. The image of her who had realised that making her face bright red and screaming vehemently seemed to come into his mind.



On the very same day, Quique who had visited the royal palace finished a meeting of nearly an hour and left the office of Roland Kaparos-kyou. The attendees of the meeting were three people, Quique, Kaparos-kyou, and also the head director of Royal Magic Academy (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*), Orvieto Richternach.

Quique spoke to Orvieto as they walked side-by-side on the well-polished marble passage.

"...However, what's this, Head Director-dono. Even though we've been discussing like this for the sake of the request from the Seal Chivalric Order, it's simply irresponsible that the all-important His Highness isn't here"

"Ara, aren't you thinking that the discussion concluded easier when His Highness isn't here, Albiol-san?"

Orvieto, who was carrying a bundle of documents in her hand, lowered her voice and smiled as if it was amusing.

"Iya iya, that'd be so rude of me"

Quique took out his favourite kiseru from the pocket of his wrinkled white robe, shook it gently and lit a fire. Breathing in the smoke quietly, he then turned his face away from Orvieto and exhaled.

Orvieto called Quique "Albiol-san". Although she'd also add the title of "Chief Engineer (*Furigana: Maestro*)" at places where there were other people, she'd often call Quique who was much lower than her in terms of status by adding "san" to his name.

On the other hand, in regard to Orvieto, Quique made sure to properly call her "Head Director", but perhaps even if he addressed her as "Orvieto" without

an honorific, she gave the feeling that she wouldn't get angry. After all, Quique and Orvieto had a friendship which exceeded almost 20 years.

"—Nevertheless, that's truly great, Albiol-san"

"What is?"

"Your research of many years was recognised"

"I didn't continue my research because I wanted it to be recognised in particular though"

Swallowing the bitter smoke, Quique smiled wryly.

In the first place, today's meeting was related to the mass production plan of the magic motion sword (*Furigana: Espada Marefika*) that the Crown Prince had proposed. It could be said that precisely because the Crown Prince recognised Quique's research that even the Finance Minister was involved and the specific discussions began to move.

"—But maa, it became easy to secure a budget, and I can also proudly get the cooperation of the magic academy, so in that meaning, I guess it's certainly possible to say that it's great that it was recognised"

"Really..."

"Ah, but speaking of to recognise or to not recognise, the ones whom I really wanted it to be recognised by are Head Director and Babel-geika instead though"

"Me and—Shakira?"

"My research is, Head Director, the result of more than 20 years which the grudge of one ordinary person towards the pair of geniuses of established reputation had compelled him to do"

"Ara, saying "grudge", how dangerous"

"Of course; for a youngster who originally wanted to become a magic warrior and was ignorant of the ways of the world, if he personally saw Head Director and Her Eminence's magic abilities before his eyes, whether he'll genuinely admire you or become perverse and jealous, it'll only be either of those"

Quique was originally born in this capital. Although the Albiol House was a mercantile house and wasn't to the degree of being called wealthy, it was much more economically blessed than a commoner's. Quique himself was also the youngest child of the three siblings and didn't need to think about succeeding his parent too; he was in an environment where he could devote himself to the things which he liked from childhood.

The boy, Quique, was fascinated by magic then, but the fact that he didn't have an ounce of that talent was confirmed before long, and the path of a magic warrior closed early.

Nonetheless, Quique who had continued to hold an interest in the thing called "magic" strove to study by himself in the magic academy's library and the like. It was just then that Quique subsequently met the geniuses who were called "Amaddo's Pair of Bright Jewels".

"...At that time, from the moment I met Head Director-dono and Her Eminence and witnessed those magic talents, I thought of creating a world where even common ordinary people can use magic someday and had been continuing my research the whole time. Anyway, the talents of you two were to that extent"

"To be able to get the genius with an unusual talent say so, Shakira and I are honoured"

"A genius with an unusual talent? Me?"

Bending his eyebrows, Quique looked at Orvieto.

"—Since Dominas Bradmante whose name first appeared in Amaddo's history books, the Dominas who remained in the record add up to several hundreds, but no one among them used magic without depending on the magic crests which were carved onto their own bodies. ...You accomplished something which successive generations of Dominas couldn't do in a generation. If I don't call that a genius, what should I call it?"

"That's... ma, it's just that there wasn't a person who thought of doing such a thing until now, I guess"

"Then, that idea is already something of a genius"

"...Please don't flatter me. I'll feel uncomfortable"

Knocking his kiseru lightly against the corridor's stone pillar and throwing the tobacco ashes away, Quique scratched his head with a "bori bori".

More than 20 years had passed since the day they first met; Albiol had become a completely exhausted middle-aged man, and Orvieto had become a married woman, and then a widow from a Dominas candidate, but she was still beautiful even now. When that Orvieto smiled sweetly at him, even Quique who was nicknamed as an eccentric looked like he'd be in a strange mood.

"In any case, I'm grateful to Albiol-san"

"If it's about Dii, there's no need to express your gratitude. After all, it's a situation where I'm being helped by him"

"However, it isn't an exaggeration even if I say that that current child exists because of Albiol-san's invention, so—"

"Any more than this is unnecessary"

Quique interrupted Orvieto's words, went outside the corridor and came out under the setting sun.

Although one might say that a patron had sided with him, Quique's research environment didn't improve dramatically. The Crown Prince had promised to newly build a workshop for his exclusive use, but he'd have to continue his research in that army's workshop which didn't get much sunshine for a short while.

"Well then, Head Director—"

Quique, who had thought of returning to the workshop and looked back at Orvieto, noticed that she was looking in a different direction and chased after that gaze for no particular reason.

"...Is there something wrong with that young man?"

"No—"

A young man could be seen walking in the corridor which was visible on the opposite side across the lotus pond. Although he was considerably and delicately slender, he was wearing a uniform which was frequently seen in this

royal palace.

"That child, somewhere—"

"That uniform, if I remember correctly, is the Seal Chivalric Order's"

Seeing off the young man who had disappeared into the royal palace, Quique turned his neck slightly.

A member of the Seal Chivalric Order; that was to say, for Orvieto's son—Lucius, the young man was his subordinate. Perhaps Lucius had invited the boy from just now to their mansion, and thus Orvieto felt that she recognised him.

"...Is that so, I wonder?"

"Are you bothered by something?"

"It's not like that, but—"

"Iya, this is a new surprise"

"Ehh?"

Even when the young man's figure couldn't be seen, Orvieto who was absentmindedly staring that way turned her head suddenly at Quique's laughter.

"What's it, Albiol-san? Saying "a new surprise"..."

"It's that even Head Director-dono will forget things. I thought that you're a person who would never forget the things which you've seen and heard once"

"If I've a perfect memory to that extent, I shouldn't have that much hardships during my training period"

Orvieto held the documents in her arms again and smiled a little.

"—Well then, Albiol-san, do your best at work"

"Head Director as well, please don't overwork yourself"

Waving his hand lightly, Albiol started to walk.

A few days had already elapsed since Bettina left the capital as Valeria's attendant. The workshop without Bettina and Dimitar was very quiet; it was pleasant to thoroughly read the multitudinous data which Nereida had left

behind in Biranoba and to be engrossed in speculations, but on the other hand, he also felt that something was insufficient.



As he held the kiseru which didn't contain tobacco leaves already at the edge

of his lips, Quique squinted in the sunset glow.



"—Hey!? Is it really like that!?"

Seeing Valeria showing an angry expression like he had imagined merely two hours ago, Dimitar inadvertently laughed.

Valeria who had observantly spotted that,

"You! There's nothing funny! Or rather, this is an issue of our motherland's honour!"

"You hadn't thought of this until you're explained to in detail; what are you getting angry at now? Rudbeck-geika had realised this on that occasion, you know?"

When Dimitar muttered coldly, Karin who had set herself onto a cushion looked at Valeria fleetingly as she concealed the lower half of her face with a plume folding fan.

"I thought for sure that you were suppressing your anger after knowing about it, ...but I'm sorry, it looks like I've overestimated you too much again"

"Hey! Is that something which you've to purposely say to me now!? In the first place, what does "again" means; "again"!"

Karin's "I'm sorry" wasn't filled with apologetic feelings as usual. For Valeria who knew her well, it could only be heard as a provocation phrase that angered the other party instead.

Bettina, who had been opening her visor and throwing food into her armour with a "gashan mogumogu, gashan mogumogu", spoke to Valeria who was pacing around a little inside the spacious tent.

"Valeria-samaa, please calm down at any rate. It's already late at night, and there are people on the lookout in the surroundings, so if you scream in an overly loud voice, everything could be heard"

"But—!"

"Maa, it's not that I don't understand Valeria's anger as well though~"

The tent, which the Seal Chivalric Order had carried for the sake of stopping one night here, had the same size as the one that the Crown Prince used during expeditions; it was fully furnished with a low table at its centre, cushions which substituted a sofa for the Dominas to relax, and even assembly-type beds. Petra, who was sitting on one of those beds and polishing her glasses' lens, looked at Valeria with upturned eyes.

"It's natural to get angry if you're being treated like an extra of that stern Her Eminence. It's just as if Amaddo had submitted to Haiderota~"

"Right!? If it's a condition like this from now, we don't know what kind of harassment we'll encounter after arriving at Aurillac!"

"...That's enough, so don't make a loud voice at each and every thing"

Storing the sword which he had done maintenance on into its scabbard, Dimitar stood up. Turning over the rug which was suspended at the entrance for insulation with a "perari", he peeked at the situation outside. Although it had lasted somehow while he was eating his dinner, the rain had been sprinkling since just now. When considering that the journey would still continue by carriage for a while, it was unpleasant that too much heavy rain was falling.

While listening to the "sara sara" sound of rainfall, Dimitar spoke.

"His Highness knows that easy-going His Excellency well. Therefore, thinking that such an incident might be possible, it seems that he had prepared a plan from the beginning"

"A plan?"

"...It appears that the plan has arrived"

Dimitar greatly turned over the rug again and invited the visitors who had come in the middle of the rain inside.

"Excuse us for coming here at night"

The ones who had said so and carried in a black long chest were the Seal Chivalric Order's substantial top and its right-hand man, the Lucius Richternach and Derek Lindegoa pair.

"Lu, Lucius-sama!?"

Valeria, who had been pacing around inside the tent with an irritated look until then, hurriedly sat on a cushion and fixed the untidiness of her hair.

Lucius and Lindegoa placed the long chest onto the ground, sighed with a "hoo" and smiled.

"These are presents from His Highness to both Her Eminences"

"Presents?"

"I hope that you'll pulverise Sigibert-kakka's ulterior motive for me with these tomorrow"; His Highness did say it like that"

Lucius spoke proudly in some respects and opened the cover of the long chest.

"Eh—?"

"These are..."

The girls looked into the long chest and raised voices of wonder respectively.

"Fuwaaaa...! T, this is amazing~!"

"Ah~ ...when seeing things like these, as expected, it's frustrating that I didn't become a Dominas~"

Valeria looked up at Lucius,

"T, thank you very much for going out of your way to do this! We've specially troubled Lucius-sama's hands—"

"Iya, it's all right. ...If I've to tell you the truth, then it's because the members are slightly disputing among themselves on who will carry this here"

"Eh?"

"Other than this Dimitar"

Lucius thereupon poked Dimitar lightly on his elbow.

"—Generally, men are living things who are thinking about wanting to become acquaintances with beautiful and clever women. Especially if the other parties are active service Dominas; after all, they're flowers on a high peak

whom they wouldn't have the opportunity to exchange words with easily"

"No way..."

Valeria was blushing in the cheeks and shaking her body with a "furi furi". Although Valeria was being shy like this in front of Lucius, if one assumed that Lucius didn't know what her usual form was, then one couldn't help saying that this was fairly joyous.

"....."

Dimitar leaned against the tent's prop and sighed quietly.

Valeria was the sole daughter of the Costacurta House, and Lucius was also the son and heir of the Richternach House. When considering the circumstance where both of them must continue their family names, no matter how Valeria lavished her charm on him, it was impossible to take Lucius as her husband. The figure of the girl who continued her pointless endeavour was humorous, and even though he also felt just a bit of pity, Dimitar didn't say anything particularly.

"Dii"

Lucius spoke to Dimitar in a whisper.

"...Haiderota will most likely carry out small harassment like this from now on as well. As expected, they won't act in a behaviour that will become a diplomatic issue, but it's better to think that it's natural that they'll do things which they'll politically use"

"I guess so"

"Though we'll return to the capital tomorrow, we're relying on you only hereafter. Valeria-jou is an innocent lady, and Karin-jou is intelligent, —but how should I put it, they're different from you"

"They don't have the craftiness?"

"I didn't say it to that extent. ...I just wanted to say that unlike you, they lack the maliciousness, so they may not notice the plans of those people who have evil intentions"

"Ma, I won't deny that though"

Dimitar was thinking that it was fine that his role was a part like that. Rather, for these girls who—could be called “pure” in a sense—were ignorant of the ways of this world, if there wasn’t someone who was conversely well aware of the world’s dirtiness beside them, they’d be easily deceived and get caught in a plan; anyway, they’d probably stumble somewhere. It might unexpectedly be because of such a thought that Orvieto pushed him to be Valeria’s Hiera Glaphicos too.

"—Well then, we shall leave soon"

"Ah! Lucius-sama, at least leave after you’ve drank a cup of tea or something..."

Valeria looked back to the table while saying such thing.

However, there was no way that she could prepare tea of course. Since Dimitar knew that Lucius would bring over the Crown Prince’s secret plan, he had driven the maids out from the tent for the Dominas beforehand.

Dimitar softly informed Valeria who was looking around her surroundings with an “awa awa”.

"...If you wish for it, shall I go and get hot water and tea leaves? The maids’ tent is right next to us, and if it’s for covering up the face of Her Eminence who likes Lucius-sama very much, I can at least endure going in the middle of the rain and coming back"

"Hey!? W, why are you purposely using such a way of speaking—"

"To be worked hard by Her Eminence is my job after all. I don’t mind that you thrust an unreasonable demand at me without reservation like you always do. I’ll accomplish it even if I’ve to clench my teeth"

"I-I-I-I-I! I, I didn’t! I, I, I! Be it that sort of unreasonable demand or working him hard, I, I didn’t do such things! I, I didn’t do it!"

Shaking her head with a “buru buru”, Valeria’s face turned bright red and she appealed to Lucius.

"I know"

Lucius nodded with a bitter smile mixed in and struck Dimitar’s back with a

“bashin”. Keeping the smile which faced the girls as it was, he lowered his voice again and spoke to Dimitar.

"...You, be moderate in teasing her too"

"That's because she's strangely in high spirits even though she's in the middle of an important mission. Her self-consciousness is insufficient"

"Even if that's the case, causing her to be embarrassed and making her have unpleasant feelings is wrong, you know? I won't tell you to get along with her, but cease the behaviour which will purposely create the cause of discord"

"...Understood"

Shrugging his shoulders, Dimitar nodded. If he did any more than this, the serious Lucius might really start to get angry.

"Well then, we'll be leaving"

Lucius and Lindegoa courteously bowed and left the girls' tent.

"—Oi, Gacha Pink"

Dimitar carried Jagieruka's scabbard on his shoulder and called out to Bettina, who was looking inside the long chest with a pose which whether or not she had a greedy countenance—was unclear, but gave that sort of feeling somehow, once.

"You'll stay up all night here. Don't forget that you're acting as a guard officer too, all right?"

"I know"

"Ufufu, I'm so happy~"

Hitting Bachururus's sparkling helmet with a “pechi pechi”, Petra laughed with a “nihe~e”.

"We'll hold a big chatting meeting for fellow girls with everyone tonight, won't we?"

"That's right! So don't sleep! I'll keep night watch tonight!"

"...There'd be no point in you keeping night watch if everyone is staying up all night though"

Putting his hand on his forehead, Dimitar went out underneath the sky that was drizzling rain.

Although he was an exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, Dimitar couldn't sleep in the same tent as Valeria and party. Dimitar had gotten a small tent prepared for him in the nearby vicinity and would intentionally pass the night there without sleeping until morning.

"—"

Dimitar, who had entered the small tent where even one person couldn't lie down satisfactorily, held Jagieruka including its scabbard in his arms, sat down and put on a blanket from his shoulders. While wearing his boots, he didn't change his clothes or lie down so that he was ready for the worst case and could rush out any time. Spending one night in this posture was, contrary to expectations, tiring, but coming to a clean decision that it was also within his job, Dimitar quietly closed his eyes.



The river's water level was rising more than usual was probably because the rain had concentrated in a short time and fallen on the upstream mountain area. The water becoming murky due to the mud, and furthermore, green trees' leaves and broken twigs mixing into the stream were supporting that.

The rain around here approximates to a drizzle at the most, and it seemed that the damage to the crops was almost none, but as expected, when it became midnight, the figures of people going out in the vicinity was zero.

However, that was if one excluded a group in black mantles which was assembled in the vicinity of the bridge—.

It was a sturdy bridge which the inhabitants of the neighbourhood had put forward an appeal to the country to safely cross over this river where the water level often rose due to the influence of torrential rain and was only completed just around 10 years ago. If one got close to the guardrail and looked down at the river surface, it was akin to looking down at the ground from above a belfry; there were probably people who experienced dizziness at the height.

The men under the bridge were submerged to the top of their knees in the

river's current, holding onto the middle bridge pier and doing something. Whenever the front of a mantle split, a black uniform flickered from beneath that.

"...Is a construction like this really necessary?"

The man beside a youth in a coat, who was watching over the work of those mantles from above the bridge, asked him in a low voice.

"To carry out such a construction at a place like this—"

"What kind of meaning is there—is it?"

With a sigh mixed in, the youth finished the man's sentence.

"Whether it has a meaning or not, I don't know. It certainly seems like she's reading too much into things, but Her Eminence's thoughts have parts that are difficult for us petty officers to comprehend. ...However, Her Eminence had wished for this in any case. It's fine if we work as per the instructions"

"But...! Is Cyril-sama fine with that!? To be told to serve a young girl of an unknown origin like that all of a sudden—"

"Pay attention to your words. You're being disrespectful"

The youth—Cyril Duebur rebuked the man, who was the equivalent of his adjutant, and looked down at the mantles working on the river surface.

"This isn't only the Royal Prince-denka's (*the king's younger brother*), but also the King-heika's idea. Our country made the decision to put that girl up as a Dominas"

"Ha... I'm sorry"

"It's fine. —The lantern"

"Hai"

Making his adjutant carry the lantern, Cyril spread the map that was drawn on a parchment. Tracing this river and the highway that intersected it with his finger, he looked out far off in the northwest direction. However, in this night where the moon and stars were being limited a great deal due to the rain clouds, only the deep black silhouette of the forest could be seen at the most; it

was practically the same as seeing nothing.

At that moment, the soldiers who had been working under the bridge looked up at Cyril and shouted.

"Cyril-sama! The work has been completed!"

"All right... everyone come up! We'll return before the day breaks"

The soldiers, who had been working in the river at Cyril's instruction, followed a rope which was suspended from the riverbank and went up in succession. Although they should have been quite fatigued to have continued their work while going against the river's current, it didn't feel that those movements had slackened.

"In the first place, what's necessary for a Dominas isn't lineage, but pure ability and resourcefulness"

Straddling a horse that was tied at the entrance of the forest, Cyril said so.

"Where you were born in and whose child are you, such things are inconsequential. ...And now, what's requested of us is to prove that our Dominas is even more superior than Aurillac's Dominas. For the sake of that, no matter what thing it is, I'll definitely do it"

The soldiers, who had soaked in the river and worked, and the soldiers, who had been keeping watch of the surroundings on top of the bridge, imitated Cyril and mounted their horses. The night rain which had increased its force just a little might have concealed the sounds of their horses' hooves well.

"At any rate before long, I'll make them understand... who's the older brother and who's the inferior younger brother"

Wiping his face that had gotten wet in the rain, Cyril caused the bridle to resound and began to gallop.



Perhaps because of last night's rain, today's morning air was moist and felt gentle on the skin somehow. Although the sun had only stepped into a low position in the sky, it also seemed as if that radiance was making a firm promise of today's clear weather.

While both sides' Chivalric Orders' members were beginning the preparations for breakfast, Dimitar held a wooden sword that was used for practice in his left hand and stood face to face with Lucius who held a similar wooden sword.

Ever since Dimitar lived alone, the opportunity to do sword practices by the two of them had decreased remarkably. Even if he went and visited Lucius's mansion, due to the wilfulness of Orvieto who would say "If you've the free time to swing wooden sticks, then the both of you please be my opponents", that opportunity would be snatched away at once.

"....."

Dimitar originally wasn't left-handed. Lucius who was facing him also held the wooden sword in his left hand and turned his right hand to the back of his waist. In order to be able to cut the way through predicaments even if they injured their dominant arms, they used the swords with just their left hands like this and practised.

Omitting useless movements, seeing each other's distance and unleashing thrusts, or quickly moving their bodies back; at a glance, there was no flashiness, but a slow and steady war of nerves, as if whittling away the mind, was going on.

"...Isn't the dawn a little noisy?"

Evading the blow of Lucius who had utilised his wrist and cut upwards, Dimitar who had jumped greatly opened his mouth at the same time when he quietly spat out a breath.

"Maybe something appeared, I guess"

Brushing away the long hair that clung onto his cheek, Lucius answered.

"—There are things that will appear variously along the national border"

"I know that, but there's no report here at all?"

"They'll report it. ...However, His Highness and His Excellency are still resting. They're just waiting for them to wake up, probably—"

Lucius's words broke off, and a tremendous spirit flew here instead. As if pursuing that, the tip of the wooden sword flashed.

"—!"

Dimitar bent the upper half of his body, avoided the wooden sword and caught his breath slightly.

If it was an unrefined crossing of swords like colliding bodies and all, one wouldn't think that Dimitar was inferior to Lucius. One wouldn't know about the past, but Dimitar's body was bigger than Lucius's now, and his pure physical strength was probably higher too. However, when it came to practices like competing with each other's number of moves, speed and accuracy in this way, he could by no means win against Lucius. If one were to speak of predicting the opponent's movement with keen observing eyes and elaborate calculations and then moving, Lucius was one step higher than Dimitar.

Dimitar narrowed his eyes and then said to Lucius.

"...Shouldn't we bring this to an end soon?"

Before they knew it, those unoccupied people had surrounded at a distance and began to watch Dimitar and Lucius's practice. This was more or less a familiar scene for the Seal Chivalric Order's people—when he was still an apprentice member, Dimitar had often practised with Lucius—, but considering the Gale Chivalric Order's people, the practice of the pair who wielded wooden swords with one hand while sealing off their dominant hands might seem very unusual.

Lucius bent his head slightly to one side and smiled.

"Do you hate losing in public?"

"If I had to say, I hate exposing my skills more. Especially to Haiderota's people"

"I see"

Nodding exaggeratedly, Lucius lowered his sword.

There, Sigibert turned up, bringing a sporadic applause along with him.

"Yaa yaa, what zealousness since the morning. ...Were you able to sleep well last night, honourable guests?"

"This is... good morning, Your Excellency"

Dimitar matched Lucius and bowed to Sigibert.

He had noticed that Sigibert was watching them from a little while ago. Rather, he had noticed Clotilde who was beside Sigibert. The plump Dominas who was called Malena or something was also together with them, but from what Dimitar had observed, that person was weak in moving her body by herself, and her combat-related skills were probably all equally low. The matter of Dimitar saying that he didn't want to expose his skills substantially meant that he didn't want to show them to Clotilde.

"Nevertheless... do you always carry out that kind of strange practice in the Seal Chivalric Order? It's a practice method that isn't seen very much in our country though"

"No, it's not carried out in the group. It's not something that can be recommended to everybody after all"

"Hohou..."

Sigibert stopped his hand that was waving the riding crop with a "shupi shupi",

"—Well then, how about this? For the sake of a future reference, can I not request for a contest with someone from my Chivalric Order? Iya, I'd like to request that by all means"

"__"

Dimitar fleetingly peeked at Lucius's expression with a sidelong glance.

Although Sigibert had said so in a light tone, if this turned into Lucius having a contest with a person of the Gale Chivalric Order, the honours of both sides would hinge on it whether he wanted it or not. Of course, Dimitar didn't think that Lucius would lose so easily, but this wasn't a match that he could thoughtlessly accept without Isaac's permission.

However, having said that, to decline on the spot would be similar to the Seal Chivalric Order running away from a match against the Gale Chivalric Order, and its image would become worse. In any case, he probably had to ask for Isaac's decision.

"...It's fine, isn't it?"

When Dimitar was thinking if he should go to Isaac's tent to inform him of this matter, Isaac came along while yawning consecutively, as though he had chosen a suitable timing for his appearance. Valeria and Karin, and moreover, Petra and Bettina were following in the rear as well.

"I think it's fine to do so"

Dispensing with all the greetings, Isaac rubbed his eye and nodded.

"—As for the ability of Sigibert-kun's prideful Gale Chivalric Order, even I'd like you to show it to me. How about a match as a light exercise before breakfast? However, magic is excluded"

"Isaac-denka's approval has also been given out... Arushanbor!"

When Sigibert raised his riding crop, a tall man stepped forward from among the onlookers who had been watching Dimitar and Lucius's martial arts practice until a little while ago. On top of his eyes being small and not knowing where he was looking at, it was also hard to read what he was thinking of from his taciturn expression.

Sigibert clapped on that man's shoulder and said proudly.

"—This man is Nicola Arushanbor. He has mastered sword and magic at the same time, and is a brave man who contends for first, second even in our Chivalric Order"

"Fu—n"

Isaac who had been staring at Arushanbor absentmindedly held back Lucius who tried to take a step forward.

"...Your Highness?"

"That's right... let's go with Dii-kun here"

"....."

Although Dimitar's eyebrows quivered with a "bikuu" instantly, he wasn't particularly surprised. After all, he had immediately understood what Isaac was thinking about. Rather, it was Valeria, who was behind the Crown Prince, who

was opening her eyes wide in astonishment with an expression that seemed to want to say "Ee!? Why isn't it Lucius-sama!?".

"Dii..."

"No problem"

Telling Lucius a few words, Dimitar stroked his nape and stepped forward to the front.

"Malena Puyol-geika"

"Haa, haii!"

Malena, who was suddenly called by her name by Clotilde, saluted with a "bishii" in a hurry.

Clotilde supported Malena's back with her hand,

"...Unlike me who is a military person, Puyol-geika is an expert in healing magic. She can heal a small injury in a flash"

"That's how it is, so compete to your heart's content"

In other words, the other party probably had the intention of coming to seriously knock him down without going easy on him whatsoever. In fact, if it was Arushanbor who had been practice-swinging a wooden sword silently since just now, he'd no doubt make two or three armed soldiers beyond recovery in the blink of an eye despite the difficulties.

The circle of onlookers had become bigger than a little while ago. In the centre, Arushanbor and Dimitar, who was opposite him, held wooden swords in the right hands of their dominant arms and took deep breaths greatly.

"....."

Although the sound of a bell signalling the start of the contest didn't ring in particular, the fight had already begun. Dimitar perceived so.

In proportion to Arushanbor being taller by a head, his reach was also longer. The other side might be higher in physical strength as well. When it came to having a match with purely sword techniques only without using magic, fighting methods like the usual couldn't be done.

"—"

Arushanbor came moving straight from the front.

"!"

Dimitar drew back his body and dodged the blow from a directly front and overhead position. If he had thought to stop that blow carelessly, he'd be overpowered as it was and receive the wooden sword on the crown of his head.

Arushanbor promptly switched the wooden sword, which was evaded by Dimitar and sank into the ground, over to a violent thrust.

"Fuu—"

While letting the three blows of thrusts which had extended towards him in succession slide on the back of his wooden sword to ward them off, Dimitar slipped into Arushanbor's chest together with a short shout and drove a compactly folded up left elbow strike into the large man's solar plexus.

"Guu..."

The voice of Arushanbor which Dimitar heard for the first time was such a muttered groan. Even so, the taciturn large man only retreated slightly, and there was no indication of him admitting defeat. Of course, if just now was a real battle, Dimitar would probably have stabbed the knife, which was always inserted in his boots, into him instead of doing a naive action like an elbow strike.

When Dimitar showed sign of shortening the distance even more and attacking further, Arushanbor hurriedly tried to jump back.

At that timing, Dimitar trampled on the toe of Arushanbor's boots.

"Muo!? —"

Being tall meant that his centre of gravity was high, that was to say, it was connected to the fact that it was easy to destroy his balance. Arushanbor instantly unleashed his wooden sword as he fell backwards, but Dimitar agilely evaded it and in return, softly pressed Arushanbor's shoulder down.

"...Guu!"

Thrusting his wooden sword at the throat of Arushanbor who had easily fallen down face up, Dimitar looked back at Isaac.

"—Are, it ended very easily, didn't it?"

Even though Isaac had called out to him so while grinning, Sigibert couldn't say anything as he left his mouth open with a "poka". The reaction of the spectators from Haiderota's side was more or less something similar. They probably never thought that Arushanbor would be defeated so easily. Just one person, only Clotilde was staring at Dimitar with a stern expression.

"Ma, maa, things like this also happen. Un, they happen"

As if he had finally woken up from a dream, Sigibert shook his head lightly.

"—After all is said and done, this isn't a real battle. If this is a real battle, it wouldn't turn out this way. If it's a real battle!"

"Perhaps that might be so. If this is a real battle, I think our Richternach-kyou would have won even faster. After all, he's good at magic too"

"W-w, what did you say!? P-p, please try to say it once more, Isaac-kun!"

"Call me "Isaac-denka", Sigibert-kun"

"Kuoh...! T, that's irrelevant now, right!"

"Ah, that's right. We were talking about your subordinate being easily defeated by my subordinate"

"Mugi—i!"

Sigibert tore his hair off with a "bari bari" and bit on the edge of his splendid mantle.

"—B, b-b, but it's that, that! T-t, the strongest person in my Chivalric Order, isn't A-A, A, Arushanbor, you know!? In reality, Diaghilev-geika is the strongest! She's first, and Arushanbor is second! That's why, hora, i-i, it, i, it's regrettable if you thought that you've w-w, won because of a thing like this! Y, you, like I said, s, s-s, stop being conceited too!?"

"What? Are you perhaps cold? Shivering "gachi gachi" like that? Or are you trembling in anger?"

"I-I, I'm not trembling in particular!"

"Is that so? But maa, if we go by your line of argument, then Dimitar-kun isn't particularly first in our Chivalric Order as well. The most talented one is Lucius-kun, and far from being the second in position, Dimitar-kun is a child who was dismissed from the Chivalric Order for bad behaviour. ...Even so, it looks like he's an opponent who is too heavy of a burden for the second in position from your place"

"Mugigigigigigi...! S, so you didn't throw the vice-leader, but that young man here with that intention from the beginning, Isaac...!"

"Did I not say to call me "Your Highness", Sigibert-kun"

"Mugyah—h!"

While watching the form of Sigibert unsightly losing his composure with a sidelong glance, Dimitar grasped Arushanbor's hand and helped him up.

"My apologies"

"....."

When Dimitar bowed lightly, Arushanbor, without a single word, bowed even deeper and departed from that spot. He was a really simple man.

"I thought that since it was you, maybe you'd thoroughly beat him though"

When Dimitar came back to Lucius, Valeria who had shrewdly taken up position beside Lucius spoke in a tone that seemed to be making fun of him in some respects.

"—On top of that, you apologised; that's really unexpected"

"...Are you an idiot?"

Returning his rolled up sleeves to their previous positions, Dimitar sighed. To be the opponent of this girl was much more tiring than having one match against the opponent, Arushanbor.

"Although it became a fighting mess on that His Excellency's whim, he isn't an opponent whom I originally have a grudge against, and above all, we're having those people guard us from here on, you know? It might become troublesome if

we provoke them more than necessary"

"Ah..."

Valeria's smile stiffened.

While it might be true that they could heal with magic as much as they wanted, there was no way that Dimitar could viciously beat an opponent whom they'd receive assistance from after this. Although Isaac didn't say anything, what was requested of Dimitar from the beginning was such a subtle discretion.

But then, since Isaac was persistently teasing Sigibert like that, it seemed that Dimitar's effort was also in vain and that they had earned the Gale Chivalric Order's animosity.

Arranging the collar of his shirt, Dimitar wiped the sweat that had slightly surfaced on his forehead.

Although it had rained last night, it looked like it'd be a fair weather today in the daytime at least. There'd probably be many people who would come to gather along the highway to take a look at the Dominas too.

When he thought that maybe that His Excellency would then go crazy again, Dimitar believed that he'd reap what he sowed; on the other hand, he was also slightly annoyed with him.

Chapter 4: Pure Jewel

Karin Rudbeck had a second name called **“Ice Gaze”**.

Young men who had seen her studying in the **Magic Academy** (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*) were struck by the beauty of that cold gaze and they became accustomed to calling her so—even though this was slightly untrue, one could say that it was a fitting second name for her beauty.

Shakira Babel who held the position of a Dominas over a period of more than 20 years was the **“Immortal Dominas”**.

Orvieto Richternach was the **“Witch of Sunlight”**, and her son, Lucius, was the **“Knight of Moonlight”**—each had a second name given to them.

If so, what should **Valeria Costacurta**, who was extolled as the once-in-10-years talented woman, be called by the people then?

As planned for some time, the Seal Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Tanpries Aegis*) turned towards Roma and backtracked.

After seeing that off, Valeria and party departed for the capital of Haiderota, Aurillac, guarded by the Gale Chivalric Order. From today, they’d board a roofless carriage that Haiderota had prepared, and then advanced while making themselves pleasant to the people at the roadside.

Of the people who had crowded at the roadside, some were looking up at Valeria and party in a daze, and some were waving their hands wildly. In any case, it was proof that Valeria and party had tightly caught hold of their hearts.

"This itself... feels good, on the contrary"

Waving her hand with a flutter from atop the carriage, Valeria spoke to Karin who was beside her.

"Yes. As for Sigibert-kakka, I guess he’s getting angry that it didn’t go according to plan though"

Karin who replied so and Valeria as well, had adorned their whole bodies with tiaras and accessories that they never wear, and had put on even fluffier mantles from above their tabards. Although the degree of exposure of their skin had decreased a lot, one could say that their entire gorgeousness and impressiveness had increased considerably.

By having Clotilde, dressed in an awe-inspiring military uniform, stand at the head of a dazzling battle formation, and showing the form of Valeria and party being jolted in the carriage and coming along at the rear to everybody, he'd implicitly show their own country's Dominas protecting another country's Dominas—in other words, Sigibert most likely intended to appeal something like the power relationship of the two.

However, since Valeria and party's gorgeousness had increased in this way, the matter of them being treated like Clotilde's extras was avoided. At a glance, the seemingly happy-go-lucky Crown Prince had seen through Sigibert's aim and brought in these clothing from Amaddo from the start.

Heavily adding even more parts like this to the tabard which was considered to be the uniform of Amaddo's Dominas was something that should happen on the occasion of some special ceremony or so. In fact, it was during the investiture of Dominas that Valeria and Karin were in these appearances before; this was their second time since then.

"—Nevertheless, I wonder why we aren't in this appearance regularly? Something is strange about the uniform being lighter"

Picking up the cloth of the mantle that she usually didn't wear very much, Valeria tilted her head to the side.

"Are you able to take that off immediately at the critical moment?"

Dimitar, who was sitting on the coachman's seat of the carriage, muttered in a whisper as he faced the front.

"...Maa, the reason is probably more or less like that. It's true that I also want to be in an appearance of this much regularly though"

It didn't look like she minded it very much, but as expected, it didn't seem to mean that Karin also wasn't opposed to the usual style that had a lot of

exposure.

"...To be in that appearance day and night, I think just Babel-geika, who has no chance to leave the capital unless something very serious happen, is enough"

"Now that you mentioned it, Babel-geika is in this appearance whenever we meet. ...Or rather, you know Babel-geika?"

"More or less"

Needless to say Amaddo, the "Immortal Dominas" who stood at the top of all the Dominas—Shakira Babel seldom came outside from the Bradmante palace that was built close to "Hill of Seal" at the outskirts of Roma. A point of contact for Dimitar and Shakira didn't seem to exist.

"Hey, how did you get to know her? Even we, have only met her three times so far—"

"Ask the person herself if you've the chance. It isn't something to be said by me. ...More importantly, don't let your guard down too much just because you're popular"

"I-I, I didn't let my guard down in particular"

"That's good if that's the case"

While saying so, Dimitar casually let his gaze fly to the vicinity. Even though their surroundings were enclosed by the Gale Chivalric Order's horseback riders, only he alone had been feeling tense since just now.

"You can't put your trust in the Haiderota's guards that much?"

"I won't say that the Chivalric Order here is inexperienced in combat. They're probably much better than our close friend club. —However, this place still isn't so far away from the national border"

"Eh?"

Certainly, this place still wasn't so distant from the national border. If she felt like it, she probably could gallop a horse and return to Amaddo's territory without taking an hour.

However, Valeria couldn't understand why he was being overly concerned by that.

"It's because nasty thieves frequently appear at plots of land along borders like this"

Perhaps he had anticipated Valeria's question, Dimitar answered before he was asked.

"Is there some relation between borders and thieves?"

"There is. ...From the thieves' perspective, even if they're chased by the authorities, they won't be pursued anymore if they cross the border"

"...You mean that they can't give chase, to the extent of rashly crossing the border, since it'll become a violation of national border?"

"That's how it is. It won't become a problem if our relationship is good like Amaddo and Diruma's, but even though we're in an alliance relationship, it doesn't mean that Amaddo and Haiderota are so intimate. Since they can go back and forth between such two countries and shake off their pursuers, this environment might resemble a paradise for the thieves"

"...Does the fact that it was noisy at dawn perhaps have some connection to that?"

"Ehh?"

Valeria opened her eyes wide in surprise at Karin's words. Although they had slept in the same tent, Valeria completely didn't notice the noisiness that Karin had sensed.

"Did Petra notice it? Nee?"

"Me? Not at~all"

"And Bettina?"

Setting aside Petra who had slept earlier than Valeria, Bettina said that she'd keep watch throughout the night, so she should have noticed something if she was awake.

However, when Bettina—who was waving her hand towards the roadside

with greater joy than Valeria and party for some reason—was asked by Valeria,

"Eh? Ah— ...ehehe. I fell asleep halfway and didn't notice it"

"You really..."

"But everyone had gone to sleep before me, and it was boring to stay awake just by myself; as expected, I get sleepy unless I talk"

"Can such a thing be a reason for negligence; even though you're the night watch"

Speaking bitterly in a whisper, Dimitar stroked his neck.

"...I don't know whether this morning's disturbance was the incursion of thieves from somewhere or not, but it's a fact that there are many thieves in this country"

"Maybe it wasn't recorded in the history books," Dimitar continued.

"Haiderota's national policy is that its military expansion is the top priority, so the tax is heavy. Since there's also labour especially in the rural districts, everyone is suffering. A part of the peasants who had gotten tired of lives like that abandoned their villages and took refuge in the towns, but the world isn't so lenient. Most of the people, who had dreamt of an easy life and then gathered in the towns, faced the reality that things didn't proceed as they had hoped and let their dissatisfaction smoulder. —It's a thing called "typical urban illness""

"....."

Valeria fixedly stared at the back of Dimitar who had started to say scholar-like things suddenly. She also thought of this when she had ran into him in the Magic Academy's library—it was vexing to acknowledge this sharp-tongued man—but he was a diligent studious person. And perhaps that stemmed from the desire to try not to besmirch the honour of the "Richternach" name, Lucius and Orvieto.

"—Of those people who had such dissatisfaction, it's easy for the young people especially to incline towards crimes. Even if they cause troubles in the towns and escape, since they can't return to their hometowns, they'll generally

hide in the plains and become thieves. On the other hand, the army is huge, so it's easy to carry out frauds too. There are also probably many bad soldiers who think of putting the army's weapons on the black market to make an earning. ... The thieves who stop being peasants in this way become an armed and troublesome existence"

"...I'm sorry, why does Richternach-kyou know such things?"

Karin then voiced Valeria's doubt for her.

"In the first place, no matter which country you go to, the ones who are the most well-informed in the various countries' states of affairs are the merchants. If you carefully listen to the conversations that such people get drunk and talk on and on, even if you're in Amaddo, you can guess the various countries' states of affairs to a certain extent"

"Come to think of it, Dimi-san is lodging at a bar"

"Merchants who have finished their everyday businesses will gather in that kind of store and exchange information with each other or come together to express their dissatisfaction"

"Are you perhaps living in such a place for that?"

"That wasn't my aim in particular though"

Dimitar looked at the girls fleetingly,

"...More importantly, now that His Highness has returned, the person who can stop that His Excellency's sarcasms is gone. Will your side be all right?"

"Yes. ...I'll be all right"

Karin, who had nodded slightly, directed a meaningful gaze towards Valeria.

"E, even I'll be all right!? I can splendidly ward off one or two sarcasms!"

"It'll be nice if it's only sarcasm that comes flying though"

"Exactly what sort of basis do you have?" Dimitar said such a thing and made Valeria feel unpleasant.

In the path of the ostentatious procession, a large clock tower's silhouette came into view. It was Klutoreto, a leading big town even in the southern part

of Haiderota.

"...I heard that a lodging house has been prepared in that town"

"It was a simple bed last night; looks like I can slowly rest tonight"

Sighing with a "hoo", Valeria looked up at the sky. She felt as though the clouds had increased a little more than before noon.

Perhaps it might rain again.



That day, the Costacurta House received a rare guest for the first time in several years. He was Vicente Barunaro—that was to say, the younger brother, who was far apart in age, of Valeria's father, Borha.

Although the Barunaro House was a prominent mercantile house even in Roma, the second son, Borha, who was hard to say to have business ability by any standard, was adopted into his wife's family, the Costacurta House, together with a large amount of dowry. Afterwards, the eldest brother succeeded the parents' house, and the youngest child, Vicente, was made to work at the place of a person in the same profession in the neighbouring country, Picabia. It was their deceased father's judgement to entrust him to other people and let him diligently accumulate experience as a merchant, and then get him to eventually return to the parents' home and assist his eldest brother's business rather than being pampered and be brought up in the parents' home.

That Vicente said that he had received a rare vacation and came to visit Borha.

"Roughly... how many years have it been since then?"

"That's right... if I remember correctly, it was when Valeria was still around 10 that you intruded previously, so isn't it at least five, six years already?"

Vicente who was led into the Costacurta House's living room extended his healthily suntanned arm and picked up the wine glass.

Vicente, who was more than 12 years younger than Borha, just finally became 30 this year, and was a handsome man with masculine features who didn't

resemble his older brothers. Since the Bellanda Company, which Vicente was entrusted to, traded in various foodstuffs centring on wheat, he probably became like this naturally while carrying heavy sacks of wheat on his shoulder and working. The growth of his younger brother was a small surprise for Borha who remembered well the childhood of Vicente who had a weak constitution; at the same time, he also felt happy.

"—Nevertheless, exactly what kind of curious turn of event is it? For you to have come to visit my place"

"That's why I said it, right? I received a vacation"

"If it's a vacation, you should have had it many times during these five years, right? In spite of that, even though you returned to our parents' home, you didn't come to show your face at my place at all. It's normal to think that something special has happened since you suddenly came along now"

"...Borha-aniue is also sharp, contrary to my expectations"

Stroking his chin that had grown a thin beard, Vicente smiled broadly.

"Did you think that I was an idiot!?"

"Iya iya, I'd never think that Ani-ue who was allowed to go to university was a mere idiot. It just wasn't entirely being made the best use of for business; if anything, your head is good, isn't it? However, what's bad about Ani-ue is that when things become related to Valeria, you really become an idiot. ...At any rate, you remained hated by her even now, right?"

"Gununu...!"

When he was being told that, Borha had no words to reciprocate. It was a fact that the relationship between him and his daughter was strained.

Vicente, who was grinning and gazing at the expression of such an older brother, suddenly tightened his lips,

"...As a matter of fact, I've been visiting several places here and there for the purchasing of grains in this one month or so. Hence, I received a vacation the day before yesterday and came back to Roma"

"Hou"

"...I heard that Valeria is going to Haiderota?"

"Ha? Ah... I don't know if she's the goodwill ambassador or what, but umu, she had went out anyway"

Borha became slightly bad-tempered at his younger brother's words. When he recalled the matter of his daughter's mission, he remembered even the matter of the impertinent Hiera Glaphicos as it was a set with that.

After Vicente had looked around his surroundings as if he was afraid of the vicinity for some reason, he pushed the wine glass aside and leaned his body forward on the low table.

"Though I think that it'll be terrible if I carelessly talk about a thing like this and then it becomes a strange rumour, ...there's something weighing on my mind just a little. I thought that it might be better to tell it to Ani-ue"

"What? What in the world is it?"

"There was a strange change in the market price of grain in Picabia. ...It looked like someone purchased quite a sizeable quantity of grains; things such as wheat and corn"

"What's so strange about that? I don't understand business well, so explain it a little easier for me to comprehend"

"To put it simply... that's right, the harvesting of the wheat which was sowed in winter is generally the period after this until summer, but you understand that, don't you?"

"Umu"

"In other words, now is the period when the quantity of wheat which appears on the market is the fewest in the year. Hence, it's expensive"

"I see... that's indeed strange. Do you mean that if it's a bit longer, this year's harvest will begin, and new wheat will instantly appear on the market, and its market price will also decrease, and yet there's someone intentionally purchasing them at this timing when the price is high...?"

"Yes. If there's a famine somewhere, then it's still understandable, but the climate has also been stable these several years, and there's no place that

seems to be experiencing a famine. I don't know about the other side of the mountain in the south though"

"Mu? Then, who on earth would carry out such an uneconomical behaviour? And for what exactly?"

"That's it"

"Kon kon", Vicente tapped the table with his finger and furrowed his brow.

"A situation where a large quantity of grains becomes necessary even though there's no famine—can you not guess it?"

"...It can't be?"

Feeling like the outline of the conversation had finally come into sight, Borha's complexion changed.

When grains which constituted staple food like wheat were purchased in a large quantity, what one must consider in the foremost was the possibility of war occurring. No matter how powerful an army might be, it couldn't fight if there were no provisions.

Borha stood up from the sofa, joined his hands together behind his waist and started to walk aimlessly inside the wide living room.

"...And the whereabouts of those wheat?"

"Ah, Bellanda-san also said that he was bothered by this and tried to investigate in different ways, but it seems that quite an amount of wheat is flowing into Yururogu through various wholesale stores"

"Yururogu...!?"

"In addition, Amaddo's Dominas said that they'd visit Haiderota at this timing. ...It's a little suspicious, right?"

"Mu..."

Borha slapped his forehead with a "pechin" and looked outside the window.

There was still a bit more time until evening. If he hurried to the royal palace from now, he might be able to meet with the minister within today. Of course, a mere citizen who didn't have any kind of title shouldn't be able to meet with an

important person of the government so easily, but even though things might appear this way, Borha came from the wealthy Barunaro House, and moreover, he was the son-in-law of the Costacurta House now; additionally, he was the biological father and guardian of the active service Dominas, Valeria Costacurta. Even without an appointment, he could probably get him to listen to his story at least.

"...Vicente, I'm going to the royal palace after this"

"As expected, you're going, huh?"

"Umu. If something were to happen to Valeria by any chance, it won't be a problem of our Costacurta House only. If it's the Finance Minister, Kaparos-kyou, I can probably meet him at once"

"If that's the case, please promote Bellanda-san at any cost for me"

Vicente floated a bold smile with a "niyari" again and held out his right hand towards his plump older brother.

"—I'm not saying that I expect gratitude in return, but I quickly taught you the information that I've caught hold of in the business here, so that much is fine, isn't it?"

"I don't really understand business though"

Grabbing his younger brother's hand back, Borha shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems that the master of your workplace is quite a capable person. Though I, who have left the family, am not in the position to be able to say this, study to the utmost; sooner or later, you'll have to support Ani-ue"

"Yes. ...For the time being, I'll return to our parents' home tonight and be Ani-ue's liquor partner"

The face of Vicente who laughed with a grin was completely an adult already.

When Borha who had seen his younger brother, who said that he'd walk leisurely and go back, to the entrance hall returned to his study at a quick pace, he summoned the maids, Nei and Maru.

"I'm going to the royal palace, so I'll entrust the preparation of the carriage to you. And if I remember correctly, there's the wine that was sent here from my

parents' home to celebrate Valeria's Dominas inauguration, right? Hurry up and wrap that up. I'll make it into a gift to Minister-kakka"

"Ano... is that fine; taking, um, Ojou-sama's wine out as you please—?"

"Since she said that she didn't want a present from my parents' home, ma, it'll probably be fine"

Borha, who had laughed in what looked to be self-ridicule, noticed that his face in the mirror was slightly nervous and lightly clapped his cheeks. Borha, who was born in the wealthy Barunaro House and was also now the biological father of a Dominas, had not a few opportunities to meet with royalty and titled nobility, so he wouldn't be nervous because of a meeting with the minister now, but the topic was, as one would expect, a topic this time.

"—Though Valeria didn't inform me, did you not hear about roughly when she'd be coming back?"

"Ojou-sama's return, is it? I was told that it might be a little long this time, but even concretely when it'll be is—"

Nei who had brought the wine, which was put in a wooden box, from the basement shook her head at Borha's question.

"...Ano, did something happen to Ojou-sama?"

"I'll be troubled if something happened. That's why I'm going to take measures ahead of time"

Coughing "after all, I can only do that much", Borha personally carried the box of wine in his arms and headed for the entrance hall.



Perhaps it was originally supposed to be a lodging for government special envoys coming and going between Amaddo and it, Klutoreto's tabard inn was something like the residence of a small noble rather than an inn. There was a garden which was specially partitioned by high walls in the front, and despite being near the town's business district, a moderate degree of silence was assured indoors. It seemed that today's guests were just the Gale Chivalric Order and Valeria's party, and it was unlikely that they'd be troubled by curious

onlookers.

Valeria's party, who had unpacked their baggage and taken a short rest, gathered in a hall, where a huge table was prepared, for the dinner that began along with the evening. Many dishes of delicious-looking cuisines were lined up on top of the table, and Malena, who had seen those, plainly let her throat sound a "gokuri". As expected, it was easier for Valeria to become friendly with this girl than with Clotilde who seemed to be always wearing a cool-headed mask.

"Well then, once again... welcome to Haiderota, both Your Eminences"

Sigibert raised his wine glass and spoke to them. Sitting at the table were Sigibert, Clotilde and Malena, these three people, and moreover, Valeria's party of four people—Valeria and Karin, and also the two Hiera Glaphicos who were opposite to them.

"Though I wasn't able to provide adequate hospitality yesterday because of the night camping ground, I've ordered the chefs to display their abilities tonight. Saa, please eat"

From that statement, it was clearly transparent to see that he wanted them to praise Haiderota's cooking. Maybe because Isaac had returned to his country and the person who would tease him was gone, it was completely Sigibert's unrivalled sphere of activity already.

Of course, Valeria didn't intend to needlessly find fault with the cuisines that were lined up on the table. Staking Haiderota's dignity—though it was exaggerated to say something like that, the numerous cuisines which he prepared, probably having a pride close to that, were certainly wonderful and delicious.

"—By the way"

Keeping a smile which seemed nasty in some respects on his mouth, Sigibert began to talk. Sarcasm might burst forth immediately. Valeria looked at Sigibert with upturned eyes while inserting her knife into a falsetto chicken that was filled with garbanzo beans and cheese and then grilled.

"What do you think of the continent's situation in the recent years?"

"...The continent's situation?"

"Yes. —Especially in your country, a rebellion just occurred very recently too, didn't it? Though a nation's times of peace and war, rise and fall are normal in this world, your minds have no time to feel at ease, right? Ahaha"

Valeria became slightly angry at Sigibert who had laughed happily while saying "it's terrible, isn't it?". From the point of view of Haiderota who regarded Amaddo as its rival, the recent rebellion in Seriba, so to speak, others' misfortune, might be a thing called the "taste of honey".

"...If you're talking about the rebellion in Seriba, that was suppressed in the early stage with Costacurta-geika's great efforts; it wasn't a matter to the extent of our minds being disturbed"

Karin indifferently, but immediately, shifted to the counterattack.

"Besides—I'm sorry, if it's about being troubled by internal rebellion elements, then our country can't possibly compare with your country"

"....."

Sigibert's expression stiffened with a "hikii".

If she remembered correctly, in a book that Valeria had read, nearly 100 years ago, there was a big dissension stemming from the throne succession issue in Haiderota, and one part of the royalty, which had parted from the current royal family, declared independence in a province. Apparently the region which became independent was approximately 20% at most of the entire country, but even so, the reality of the country dividing into two didn't change.

However, Haiderota's royal family stubbornly didn't accept that, calling their ex-relatives who had become independent "rebellion elements"; even regarding the new nation that they had established, they claimed that it was a province of their own country which was illegally occupied by rebellion elements to the bitter end. Incidentally, Amaddo attached importance to its relationship with Haiderota and didn't recognise the aforementioned new nation as a country.

In any case, Karin's remark must be a scathing sarcasm for Sigibert. Even though they were being troubled by rebellion elements for many years, Sigibert

was also quite careless to have shelved that and brought up this topic.

Beside Sigibert whose expression had stiffened, Clotilde coldly narrowed her eyes. Perhaps she thought that this young master had said needless things again—things like that.

"Um— ...ah— ..."

Just when Sigibert cleared his throat again and tried to retake control, Clotilde calmly spoke the next words at once without leaving a pause.

"—Excuse me"

Those words gave one the impression of cold metal.

Clotilde, who had put her knife and fork down and wiped her mouth with a napkin, stared at Valeria.

"Costacurta-geika is a lady who is referred to as the “once-in-10-years talented woman” even in the magic superpower, Amaddo... this is an excellent opportunity; I’d like you to let me hear Your Eminence’s thoughts by all means"

"Eto... w, when you said “thoughts” ...?"

Valeria, who had asked a question in return while feeling pressured, strongly felt the gaze of Dimitar, who was sitting right next to her, on her profile. Feeling like he was giving her a warning to be careful in her response, her heart instantly palpitated.

"First, what kind of thing has Amaddo been propagating a Dominas as to its people?"

"That’s..."

Clotilde was evidently testing Valeria. She was trying to ascertain the extent of Valeria’s knowledge and insight.

"Of course, Dominas, um... as the symbolic wives of the “Lord of Redemption (*Furigana: Redountra*)”, they guide the people, and that faith—"

Recalling the things that she was taught in the Magic Academy (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*), Valeria explained with faltering wording. However, since such a thing was taught to anyone in the beginning if they entered the Dominas

training, it was impossible that Clotilde, who was an active service Dominas, didn't know this. Although she vaguely felt that such an answer as per the textbook wasn't what Clotilde wanted, Valeria didn't answer other than that.

Clotilde, who was listening attentively to Valeria's words, quietly nodded with a face that had brushed feelings aside.

"That's very easy to understand—it's an answer that is easy for even children who had just enrolled into elementary schools to understand"

For Valeria, it couldn't be helped in any way that the impression of Clotilde felt like something of a condescending attitude. As though saying "it's an uninteresting answer on the level which even children who had just entered elementary schools could say", she felt like she was being made into an idiot.

And perhaps, the intuition of Valeria who had felt so wasn't wrong. A colour of obvious disdain was floating in the eyes of Clotilde whose expression is lacking more than Karin.

Following the gaze, which seemed to pierce her, of Dimitar that she felt on her right cheek, she felt Karin and Petra's gazes on her left cheek. Their worries towards Valeria could be felt in their gazes.

In other words—Valeria had committed a mistake that was glared at by Dimitar and worried about by Karin and Petra.

As soon as she thought so, her palpitation grew even quicker. Not knowing how she should follow up, the inside of her head became hot with a "ka~a".

"A, ano—"

"Well then Your Eminence, I'll ask you one more thing"

Malena, who appeared to be very uncomfortable, tried to say something while the edges of her mouth were smeared with sauce, but Clotilde ignored that and threw a question further.

"What kind of thing is Redountra's doctrine? I'd like Your Eminence to let me hear your own thoughts"

"__"

The inside of Valeria's mind became completely pure white at that question.

Valeria wasn't very good at this sort of scholarly conversation. In the first place, for Valeria, Redountra was simply something that she must earnestly show respect to; he wasn't a "what's his doctrine" existence. Magic could be used even if she had never thought deeply about Redountra's doctrine; rather, she felt that was it not important to continue believing without thinking about unnecessary things to borrow Redountra's powers.

Therefore, even if Redountra's doctrine existed, it wasn't something that she could explain this or that to people—was what Valeria was thinking. At the very least, it was impossible to logically explain it to Clotilde at this place now.

"Diaghilev-geika, regarding that—"

"If Rudbeck-geika has a personal opinion, I'll ask you afterwards. First, allow me to hear Costacurta-geika's thoughts"

Clotilde flatly rejected Karin who had tried to interject.

Valeria, who couldn't hope for Karin's timely help, put down her cutlery and clenched her fists. If she held the knife poorly, her hand might tremble and make coarse "kacha kacha" noise.

—Even though such a thing was thought, the answer to the main question didn't come to mind at all.

After a long, long silence, Clotilde quietly took a deep breath and slowly nodded with that triumphant expression again.

"...It seems that my question was too vague. I'm sorry"

Although she was outwardly apologising to Valeria, it was to the end superficial only. The expression of Clotilde completely told a different thing. As though seeming to want to say either "I've seen your limits" —or "you're of this standard?", a thin and faint smile clung onto her lips. It must be because she believed that she had properly seen and judged Valeria's ability that Clotilde easily retracted her question.

"..."

At the sense of defeat that she was one-sidedly knocked down and the frustration that she couldn't even counterattack, Valeria felt the inside of her

nose became “tsu~n”.

If it was magic skill, she wouldn't fall behind even if her opponent was Clotilde. Even though she didn't know whether she could win or not, she could at least fight head-on.

However, when it came to an academic battle of words, Valeria was at her wit's end. It was frustrating, and Valeria almost cried. Thinking that she'd really lose if she cried, she somehow endured that alone. She had no choice but to endure.

Perhaps he felt that a retort had been repaid in the exchange just now, Sigibert's disappointed expression from until a little while ago had disappeared, and he was drinking wine while grinning. In fact, he looked like he'd start to hum a tune at any time.

"...May I say one thing?"

When Valeria was firmly biting her lips, Dimitar, who had been continuing his meal in silence until then, removed the napkin which was thrust into his collar and opened his mouth.

Clotilde slowly shifted her gaze to Dimitar.

"...What might it be, Richternach-kyou?"

"It's the matter of Diaghilev-geika's question from just now..., but to begin with, it's meaningless to ask Costacurta-geika that sort of thing"

The thin smile vanished from Clotilde's face, and a suspicious expression surfaced.

"Why is that again?"

"Costacurta-geika doesn't answer that sort of question. Or rather, she can't answer it"

"__"

What did this person started saying again?—Valeria opened her eyes wide and looked at Dimitar. In regard to this, it wasn't just Valeria, but Karin and Petra, and above all else, Clotilde was surprised.

""Can't answer it"—what in the world is that?"

"How Redountra's doctrine proves to be depends on the interpretation of the person who receives it. One may say that there are tens of thousands ways of thinking. Hence, I understand the reason that a person to explain the meaning to the people is needed. Perhaps in your country, Diaghilev-geika shoulders that duty"

Without even a slight pause, Dimitar spoke at length. There wasn't even an interval for Clotilde to interpose.

"But in our country, there are—ways our country's Dominas ought to be. In our country, telling Redountra's doctrine to the people is done by Shakira Babel-geika. And then, reading an extensive amount of history books, collecting and arranging the words of wise men, and bequeathing them to future generations are things that Karin Rudbeck-geika ought to do. And Valeria Costacurta too, as expected, has the thing that she ought to do"

"The thing that Her Eminence ought to do is?"

"It's "to stand beside the people""

Clotilde opened her eyes wide in surprise.

Moreover, Valeria also opened her eyes wide in astonishment. It was her first time hearing that she had such a role.

However, Dimitar was confidently talking about her position that Valeria herself didn't hear of either.

"—Most of the people are unrelated to difficult doctrine. They just genuinely believe in Redountra. Indeed, originally, difficult doctrine and books are not needed in order to believe in God. Costacurta-geika is a lady who embodies that"

In short, Dimitar was saying that Valeria was a Dominas, who didn't understand difficult things well, whom people, who didn't understand difficult things well, felt familiar with. It was quite an inexpressible, complex feeling similar to being looked down on and being praised, but it didn't mean that there was no persuasive power.

For the people who weren't scholars, the books which were written about Redountra's doctrine were too difficult. After all, they were to the extent that Valeria herself didn't bother to read them properly.

Nevertheless, even such a Valeria could be blessed with magic talent and become a Dominas.

"...This is undoubtedly God's grace"

Dimitar spoke in succession so as not to give the other party time, fully demonstrating his glibness that was usually used to corner Valeria mentally.

"Knowledge isn't always necessary in order to believe in Redountra. One can just earnestly believe in Him. God is able to bestow grace onto this faith that could be called "simple honesty". Costacurta-geika is a lady who embodies such a love of God"

"Love of God—"

"Looking at Her Eminence, Amaddo's people understand the importance of a heart that believes in Him. People who can learn, people who can't learn, and even people who can't even read characters, as long as they've hearts that believe in God, they can receive that grace... people look at Her Eminence and perceive so. And also, Her Eminence's existence makes people feel that God is closer to them. —Thus, Her Eminence is extolled "Pure Jewel" by Amaddo's people"

This was again Valeria first time hearing that such a second name was given to her. As it was somehow heard like this when Dimitar said it, she went beyond being amazed and was even impressed. Indeed, since even Valeria who didn't understand things like difficult doctrine in the slightest was competent to be a Dominas in this way, people who thought that something good might happen if they prayed earnestly also probably existed in their own ways without a doubt.

Clotilde who had kept silent for a while, perhaps collecting her thoughts in that short time, tried to open her mouth once more.



"—Speaking of close to oneself"

Prior to Clotilde uttering a word, Dimitar continued and started to talk.

"That Puyol-geika is a big eater. It's really pleasant to be watching her"

"__"

The lower parts of Clotilde's eyes quivered with a "hikuu", and she glanced at Malena who was beside her in silence. The Malena in question—as she made her cheeks, which had stuffed food just like a squirrel, puffed up—was shrugging her shoulder with a "bikuu".

"She's a lady who seems easy to get on with; surely she's adored by Haiderota's people too, I think"

"That's... of course"

Clotilde nodded laconically. However, her cool-headedness which had no gap until just now crumbled a little, and she seemed to be feeling awkward somehow. If one were to look very careful, Sigibert also showed a grim expression. Although it wasn't well understood, it seemed that for them, they couldn't welcome the fact that Malena was touched upon much.

Sigibert personally poured wine into their glasses and quickly changed the topic.

"—By, by the way, how's the cuisine, I wonder? Do they suit your taste?"

"We're eating very deliciously~"

Petra's long-drawn-out words caused the strained atmosphere to relax in a skilful manner. She had probably aimed for that effect and answered in that way at the very beginning.

Thereupon, Malena who had shown the most relieved expression, more than anyone at that place, hurriedly cleaned the edges of her mouth with a napkin and started to talk about tonight's cuisine.

"T, this pie, baked in a parcel, is Haiderota's local speciality, a, and is called "Coffin Pie"! The case which was made with pie dough is likened to a coffin, and minced meat of calf and lamb which was seasoned with spices is stuffed in there and then baked—"

Malena, who had been timidly peeking at Clotilde's complexion only until

then, became talkative as soon as she started the explanations of the cuisine. Although one could easily imagine if he saw that figure and her actions up to this point and so on, this girl might really love to eat.

In the end, the talk of “what Redountra’s doctrine is” fizzled out on that note, and it was possible to calmly enjoy the wine and cuisine while listening to Malena’s explanation, which put professionals to shame, in the latter half of the dinner.

In short—Valeria was saved by Dimitar.



Although he inwardly took offense at Clotilde’s provocation at the place of the dinner, Dimitar had no complaints about the cuisine itself. It might be better to not carelessly talk about the splendour of that menu to Bettina who couldn’t get the same cuisine.

Dimitar, who was prepared a room beside Valeria’s party, opened the window and tried checking left and right. This place was the third floor above ground, and a beautifully maintained green garden spread out under his eyes. In case something happened by some chance, he might have to carry Valeria’s party in the arms and escape from this height.

Gulping down the water of the pitcher, which he had gone to the kitchen, taken it and then came back by himself, a little, Dimitar sat on the bed.

No sooner had he sat down than the sound of a reserved knock was heard.

"....."

Immediately standing up again, Dimitar removed the crosspiece and opened the door with a sigh mixed in. He had a rough idea of who had come.

"...Ano"

The one who was at the other side of the door was, as expected, Valeria. Gazing at Dimitar with upturned eyes, she was being bashful somehow.

"...Do you’ve some business with me?"

"Rather than business—"

"I want to rest when it's time to rest. Quickly get it over with"

Muttering curtly, Dimitar returned to the bed.

Was she comparing it with her room where she was living together with Karin and Petra? While looking around the area restlessly, Valeria appeared to be choosing her words carefully.

"Um... a little while ago"

"Are you talking about the matter during the meal?"

"Un—"

Even though she nodded so, she didn't continue beyond that point. However, if he were to consider the stout-hearted Valeria's personality, it might be a matter of course.

Dimitar had sent a timely help to Valeria who was one-sidedly cornered in an argument by Clotilde at the place of the dinner. He thought that she had come to say a few words of thanks for that matter, but if she couldn't honestly say thanks, then it was a mere waste of time.

Getting slightly irritated, Dimitar began to talk of his own accord together with an exaggerated sigh again.

"...If you're thinking of saying thanks to me, that's not necessary"

"Eh?"

"It's unnecessary to say thanks. Though with respect to timing, it became a state where I seemed to have followed up for you, it's my job to follow up for you; to begin with, I didn't lie. I just told the truth"

"T, that's a lie! In the first place, what was it, hora? "Pure Jewel"? I'm not called by such a second name!"

"Maa, that certainly felt a little too exaggerated, but it's fine, isn't it? We just have to suitably spread rumours like that and induce everyone so that you're really called so when we return to Roma. ...First, even though Babel-geika and Rudbeck-geika have second names like those, it isn't good, with regard to your position, that only you don't have it"

"However, such a thing isn't something that is given to me by ourselves, is it...?"

"What's important is the image. It's a fact that Dominas has a symbolic aspect; it doesn't mean that somebody becomes unhappy because we've just manipulated it a bit"

"That's true, but..."

Valeria, who was complaining unintelligibly, was looking downwards, seemingly embarrassed in some respects. Even though her desire for improvement was strong, to be reserved only at times like this was neither a virtue nor anything. Dimitar knitted his brows and pointed at the bed.

"Sit"

"...Hai?"

"It's fine, so sit. We're going to Haiderota's capital after this; if it turns into a situation like just now again, so that you can come through it even if I'm not beside you, I must get you to become conscious of yourself without fail"

"...Y, yes"

Looking down on Valeria who had demurely sat down with a meek expression, Dimitar cleared his throat slightly.

"...Can you quarrel with Rudbeck-geika and then win?"

"...Eh?"

"You can't win"

"U... ma, maa, I've the confidence that I won't be discouraged, but..."

"I won't call that winning. —Anyway, it's a fact that that Karin-sama is more eloquent, and seeing the flow just now too, to put it bluntly, you've no chance of winning if you're challenged to a battle of words by Clotilde"

"....."

Although Valeria looked up at Dimitar with a sharp look, she didn't object. As one would expect, it might be impossible for her to not admit that.

"—That's why, you can completely leave that side to Karin-sama already"

"...And that's fine?"

"It doesn't matter. Even if you do your best now, you can never become like Karin-sama. However, if it's just simple power, you might be able to surpass Babel-geika. Besides, I said it just now too, right?"

"W, what was it...?"

"You, who is always speaking carelessly and confidently even without any basis, is an existence that is even easier to get on with than Karin-sama and Babel-geika to the people who similarly don't understand difficult doctrine and the like. It's only because there's an existence like yours that everyone feels at ease"

"...Isn't that expression somewhat worse than just now?"

Valeria pouted her lips and knitted her brows.

"Don't mind each and every minor detail. —Anyway, it's fine as long as you understand the general education and the world's common knowledge. Be it doctrine or what, you don't need to use your brain for abstruse things. I think that perhaps Head Director too, isn't expecting such a role of you"

"Ehh...?"

"What is it, that face which seems so dissatisfied?"

"That's because"

"Then, shall I say it this way? Frankly speaking, you're more straightforward than Karin-sama, and your smile is cuter than hers"

"Eh!? C, cute?"

"After all, her smile is a smile that seems to be concealing something behind it. Though men of the type who likes that sort of smile probably exist too, the smile that is widely liked by men and women of all ages is yours. Since only this is a question of natural appearance and personality, Karin-sama can't surpass you no matter how much she endeavour"

"...Is, it that so...?"

As she held her cheeks with both hands, Valeria's face turned red and she

mumbled. She probably never thought that she'd be praised like this. Speaking of simple, she was simple, but such a sincere and honest part was surely an important factor to a Dominas who was widely loved by the people.

Stroking the nape of his neck, Dimitar spoke.

"Listen, all right? Remember this properly. So, if that soldier Dominas who seems to have a bad personality tries to start things that look like battle of words again, smile cheerfully and say that you'll leave that sort of things to Rudbeck-geika"

"I, I see... un. I understand"

"But if she still appear to be persistent, find fault with the other Dominas"

"That plump child?"

"That's right. Precisely tease about the part of her being fat. If you do so, the other party also have no choice but to be quiet"

"Isn't that a little... impolite towards the girl? With matters regarding outward appearance—"

"If the other party tries to single out your lack of discernment for criticism, we'll just single out that Puyol-geika's figure for criticism. In the first place, that's probably an important matter for a Dominas as well. It's because her self-awareness as a Dominas isn't enough that she becomes that sort of figure. She reaps what she sows"

Although a beautiful appearance was requested of a Dominas who was God's wife, in a different meaning from that again, always maintaining the beautiful proportion was also requested of her. Or rather, even if she wasn't a Dominas, since she was a magic warrior (*Furigana: Marefikos*), it was also possible to say that the maintenance of her figure was her responsibility.

Dimitar glared at Valeria with a "girori".

"I shall say this in advance..., but I won't tolerate it if you become chubby like that girl or conversely become thin to skin and bones, you know? At the worst, I might get stuck with drawing and changing your entire body's magic crests"

"Eh!? W, why!?"

Holding her stomach down in a hurry, Valeria became flustered.

"That's obvious. If your vertical and horizontal proportions change, the proportion of the magic crests which are carved on your skin will also change. If the degree is very bad, you won't be able to draw the correct magic squares, and the need for alteration will arise"

"Ah, I see..."

"I don't know whether you're conscious of it or not, but most likely, your magic crests should have been slightly adjusted to match your growth many times until now. Unrelated to the matter of being fat or thin, girls who are at the age of adulthood will also grow taller in one go at a certain stage"

"...Now that you mention it, my chest also grew bigger in one go about two years ago—"

Valeria, who was looking down on her breasts and speaking to herself in a murmur, raised her face as if she was surprised and quickly hugged her chest.

"Ahhhhh! No, that's wrong! It's nothing!"

"Don't scream"

Shrugging his shoulders, Dimitar shook his head.

"...In any case, Haiderota's second Dominas should have quite the ability, but it seems that she can't maintain her figure. In a sense, "a Dominas who lacks self-awareness" may be the cause of headaches for Clotilde. She probably shouldn't be able to play innocent to that and find fault with you, so remember this well"

"U, un..."

While her face was red, Valeria stood up and started to walk towards the door.

"Ano... sa"

"That's enough, so return to your room quickly"

I won't get any benefit even if I'm told thanks, *et cetera* by you—was what he wanted to say, but if he had said that, this girl might start to scream again. He

didn't want to come to a foreign country and expose Amaddo's shame.

"This place is the country of those people who are always aiming for an opportunity to stand in the way of Amaddo. ...Thoroughly think that your own actions are directly linked to the evaluation of our motherland's Dominas and then act"

"...I understand"

Valeria, who had nodded admirably, seemed to have said "Thank you" in a small voice just before she went out to the corridor and closed the door behind her, but perhaps that might have been Dimitar's hearing mistake. Either way, since opening the once closed door and going out of his way to ask her back things like "Oi, what did you say just now?" might only rub Valeria's nerves the wrong way, it was definitely better to preferably pretend not to have heard it and then sleep.

When Dimitar extinguished the light of the candlestick, he leaned his body against the bed's backboard, held Jagieruka in the arms and shut his eyes.

Chapter 5: What's Dreadful is—

The current king of Haiderota, Remi Christian Duevre, was a person of legitimate lineage among Haiderota's legitimate lineage.

On the other hand, the leader of the **“Rebel Army”**, which had spread its influence centring on Yururogu in Haiderota's northern part, was Euchemard Duevre. Although he was of illegitimate lineage, he was a person who had inherited the blood of the respectable royal family.

The biggest cause of Haiderota's break-up turmoil prolonging this much was, in contrast to the successors of the legitimate lineage, who under normal circumstances were faultless, being entirely mediocre people only, people who were certainly allowed to be called “great men” appeared one after another in the successor of the illegitimate lineage and that family.

Maybe it was because various things happened that even though she should be tired, she couldn't sleep very well that night.

However, due to that, she noticed the commotion immediately.

"...!"

Valeria, who had pushed the blanket aside and stood up on the bed, pointed at the candlesticks which were installed on the room's wall in turn. “Shupii, Shupii”, tiny flame arrows ran and gradually expelled the darkness from within the dark room.

"Karin, Petra! Wake up!"

Calling out to them so, she jumped down from the bed. When she had changed her underwear in a big hurry and worn her usual ceremonial dress, Valeria rushed over to the window and pulled open the curtains.

"...What's~the matter? It's not morning yet, right...?"

Groping for her glasses that were placed at the bedside and then grabbing it, Petra complained in a seemingly sleepy voice. Karin, the other party,

straightened up her back and got up, and then narrowed her eyes and seemed to be listening carefully.

"...The horses are neighing"

"It's noisy outside. Something might have happened!"

Valeria pushed open the window and revealed her face.

The town, which had already fallen asleep when Valeria's party got into their beds, was ruled by an unexpected commotion. The voices as if many people were shouting, the neighs of horses, and moreover the sounds of horses' hooves could be heard from extremely nearby. In addition, a burnt-like smell was somehow permeating the night air that carried a little moisture.

"...A fire?"

"It looks like a fire has broken out from the rear stable"

When she was startled by a voice that flew here suddenly and looked to her left, similarly opening the window, Dimitar was leaning forwards. He had already finished changing his clothes. Or rather, since it was this alert boy, he might have been taking a nap in a war preparation state without even changing his clothes in case of an emergency.

"How are Karin-sama and Glasses?"

"They're awake, but—"

"Finish changing your clothes. I'll take Gacha Pink and go to your room"

Saying so one-sidedly, Dimitar then withdrew his face.

"...What does he mean? What happened?"

Karin asked Valeria who had closed the window and turned around.

"I don't know yet..., but for now, it looks certain that a fire has occurred at the rear stable. Richternach-kyou said that he'll arrive shortly"

"Eh—, I wish that he'd wait just a little"

When Valeria looked, Petra, who was dressed in her underwear, was looking into the mirror and fiddling with her hair. Valeria put her hand on her temple and sighed "ha~a".

"...Will you put on your clothes before combing your hair?"

"I don't mind in particular though~"

Looking at Valeria with a glance across the lens, Petra smiled meaningfully. Valeria put on a thin dress and her tabard and snorted slightly.

"If you're saying that, even he isn't interested in you, and he won't care either, will he? He said that he likes older women"

"Are~? This is surprising; Valeria, you had that sort of conversation with him~?"

"....."

Intending to lightly sidestep it and yet was strangely hounded, Valeria became at a loss for words.

Then, there was the "domu domu" sound of a knock with weight and a little girl's voice that could be called carefree.

"Valeria-sama—! Karin-sama—! Petra-sa~n—! Please open up!"

"You don't have to confirm one-by-one"

The voice of an arrogant boy and a "gain" sound similar to striking metal was heard, and the door opened with a "gachari".

"Iya~n, I haven't finish changing my clothes yet~"

While fastening the buttons of her blouse, Petra raised an unnaturally sweet scream. However, Dimitar just glanced at her and ignored her, and quietly closed the door after checking the corridor once.

Bettina, who had ran up to Valeria with a "gassha gassha", stamped a little with a "dosu dosu" and spoke, looking excited somehow.

"It's terrible! The fire at the back, it seems like an arson!"

"An arson?"

"...If you think about it, that is so, isn't it? In this season, the stable originally isn't a place that seems to use fire after all"

Karin calmly analysed.

"The soldiers on the lookout had noticed the outbreak of fire and taken the horses out from the stable for the time being, but it seems that they behaved violently and ran away. I think that it's noisy because of that..., but if we assume it to be arson, it becomes a troublesome matter"

"....."

This tabard inn was assumed to be where special envoys of Haiderota or Amaddo would fundamentally sojourn. Setting fire to the establishment there meant that it might be valid to think that it was the deed of the people who held animosity towards Haiderota or Amaddo.

In addition, if he set fire at this timing, the possibility that this was an offence of someone who aimed for Valeria's party also existed. The fact that Dimitar was placing one hand on the hilt of his favourite sword as he stood near the door indicated the tensed current situation.

"__"

Dimitar tightened his mouth and looked at the door. That face was a face that had sensed something. Valeria could hear the noisy footsteps of "dota dota" approaching as well.

"E, excuse me!"

Malena, who was wearing her military cap, came flying into the room in a hurry without even a knock. Letting sweat float on her forehead and busily breathing "fuu fuu", she looked around the room's interior.

"I-i, it, it looks like there's no abnormality—f, for the Amaddo's guests; t, that's the most important thing! W, well then, I've to hurry, so—"

"Wait"

Grabbing the back collar of Malena who had turned on her heel with a "kurori" and tried to leave the room, Dimitar spoke.

"What on earth happened?"

"Ehh? No, that's, um..."

"It's evident that some emergency has occurred... for the sake of protecting both Her Eminences too, I believe that I've the right to hear what happened

though?"

"Ah, that's, I understand what you're saying, but—"

"...I'd like to ask Diaghilev-geika or Sigibert-kakka directly. Where are the both of them staying at?"

"Awa... Dia, Diaghilev-geika is, um... s, searching for, His Excellency—"

The complexion of Malena, who was mentally overwhelmed by Dimitar, suddenly changed after explaining to that extent. It felt as if she had unintentionally made a slip of the tongue.

Valeria knitted her brows and asked Malena.

"By any chance... did something happen to His Excellency?"

"N, noo! There's completely! N, no such thing no such thing! H-H, His Excellency is alive h-h-h-haii!"

At her panic state that was too terrible to look at, it was understood that something had happened to Sigibert as expected.

Dimitar shook Malena lightly while grabbing the nape of her neck, and then discarded his courteous tone and spoke in a low voice.

"What's the matter with His Excellency? If you don't speak honestly, I'll make the matter of Haiderota making light of our country's Dominas into an international problem, you know? I'll have you take responsibility for it too"

"Ahhhh, I, like I said, D, Diaghilev-geika is, properly, searching for, H, His Excellency"

"Is His Excellency missing? And Diaghilev-geika is searching for him?"

"T, that's right!"

"So, in the meantime, the state guests from Amaddo are left as they are without being informed anything? This is a big problem"

"Ehhhhh!? It's a big problem even though I've spoken honestly!?"

"That might be so. After all, the leader of the Gale Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Rorudor Rafuale*), which is in charge of security, is missing, and the vice-leader left us alone and went to search for the leader. ...If something happens to us in

the meantime, it'll be a break-up of diplomatic relations, and a war if things don't go well, you know?"

"Hiiiiii!?"

"If an unforeseen situation happens to both Our Eminences, our country will have to deal with your country with a firm stance. Of course, since it means that the seals will be insufficient, the need to make an excuse to each nation of the alliance will arise, you know? —Saa, if you understand that, then say the truth quickly. For the sake of protecting yourselves as well, accurate information is necessary"



"Awawawa..."

Pressed for an answer by Dimitar, Malena's chubby skin turned ghastly pale and she became frightened. It was natural that Malena who originally looked timid would wilt if she was pressed for a decision which might become such an international problem while the two people at the top position weren't here.

And then, Dimitar had probably seen through that too, so he threatened her severely. Before long, Malena caused her throat to exaggeratedly sound a "gokuri" and started to explain the situation in a faltering tone.

"T, the truth is... His Excellency and Diaghilev-geika, before resting, had an arrangement to discuss about the plans for tomorrow and thereafter, but His Excellency didn't come to the hall even though it was time for the appointment. Thereupon, just when Her Eminence who had felt suspicious was about to go towards His Excellency's room, flames rose at the stable—"

"In the end, His Excellency is missing?"

"It, it seems to be like that... and because of that, Her Eminence ordered me to confirm your safety—"

"Before confirming our safety, you should say such an important matter without glossing over it"

Making usual drastic cuts of sound argument typical of this boy, Dimitar went out to the corridor.

"What shall we do, Richternach-kyou?"

"Go to His Excellency's room. Diaghilev-geika should also be there anyway"

"Ah!? P, please wait just a minute! I'd like everyone to stand by in the room —"

Although Malena tried to restrain them desperately, there was nobody who would obey her. Following Dimitar, Valeria and Bettina, and moreover Karin and Petra, walked in the corridor at a quick pace in succession. If one were to add a reason that looked real in curiosity, huddling together and taking action with everyone was easier to protect themselves at the critical moment—was what one could probably say. One would think that perhaps this decision wasn't wrong.

Sigibert's room which was prepared on the first floor was a little smaller than the room that Valeria's party was resting in, but if one considered that he stayed alone, it was quite spacious. However, that gorgeous room was now devastated, a mere shadow of its former self; Clotilde Diaghilev who had snugly worn her uniform was standing stock still beside the window that was casually left open.

When Clotilde, who had known that Valeria's party had come along, knitted her brows slightly, she bowed lightly and began to talk of her own accord.

"I'm sorry for the report being late. It's a state of emergency, so—"

"It... certainly looks like a state of emergency"

Looking around the interior of the ruined room, Dimitar sighed.

"It... doesn't seem to be a thief"

"Hai. For a deed of a thief, it's too skilful"

It didn't mean that one could just secretly open the window to enter Sigibert's room to steal. He'd also need to traverse that vast garden without being discovered by the members on the lookout, and in the first place, Sigibert's sword which seemed really expensive was left as it was in this room. There was no way that a thief would disregard such a thing.

"Is it a kidnapping?"

Even though Dimitar asked, Clotilde neither denied nor affirmed it. Maa, as long as one saw this situation, the impression it left of a kidnapping was very likely.

Even in such a tensed scene, Clotilde—in contrast to Malena who kept being nervous—didn't destroy her resolute expression.

"...At any rate, we'll put the effort into His Excellency's search and rescue. I'd like the guests from Amaddo to remain here, please"

"I'm sorry... that, are you telling us to handle the firefighting at the stable and the confusion of the members there?"

When Karin indifferently asked a question in return, Clotilde exchanged glances with Malena and kept silent as if she was troubled.

"We'll be troubled if either one of Your Eminences doesn't stay"

Dimitar continued Karin's words.

"The gentlemen of the Gale Chivalric Order most likely won't move on our instructions. Not to mention, if they heard that His Excellency who is the heart of the group was kidnapped, isn't it possible that the members who have strong patriotism will shake free from our control and start saying that they'll go to the search for His Excellency?"

"...I think that such a thing won't happen though"

Biting her lips, Clotilde shook her head.

"Puyol-geika, please remain here together with Arushanbor, consolidate the members and control the situation"

"Haa! U, understood!"

"Afterwards, upon making the vigilance strict and ensuring the guests' safety, send out a search party for His Excellency with Arushanbor as the commanding officer"

"Understood! ...H, however, Diaghilev-geika, what will you do...?"

"I'll be going ahead"

The minute that she said so, Clotilde bowed to Valeria's party and jumped out through the window with a speed similar to that of a wind.

"W, well then, I'll return to my mission too!"

Saluting with a "bishii!", Malena then ran out to the corridor with a "dota dota" too. "After ensuring the guests' safety"—even though she was told something like that, to have left Valeria's party there, she was someone with quite a careless nature.

Inside the ruined room where a night wind which smelt burnt blew in, the Amaddo team of five people, it was unclear who had influenced the rest first, gradually and mutually started to exchange glances.

"...What shall we do?"

"What shall we do~?"

"Ano, I'm sleepy, so I think that it's fine if we return to our rooms and sleep"

"...Before that, I think that it's better to help with the extinguishing of the fire though"

"A, ano sa"

Valeria looked at Dimitar fleetingly while caressing her lips.

"What... do you think we should do?"

"Are you asking me?"

Curving his mouth, Dimitar asked Valeria back as if it was unexpected.

"Maa... if I clear away my prejudice and assess it, then "is the best person who can make the decision which is beneficial to us in such a state of emergency not me or Karin, but you?"... is what I think though"

"...That's a rare, decent conclusion"

Dimitar, who had grinned broadly, folded his arms and nodded exaggeratedly.

"If we consider your safety to be first, then it goes without saying that we should remain here and pass the night. Most likely, the thief's aim from the beginning is the kidnapping of Sigibert-kakka. Therefore, even if we remain here, the possibility of the thief coming to attack again is low"

Setting his personality aside, Sigibert was the cousin of the current Haiderota's king, and a royalty who also possessed the throne inheritance right; hence, it was perfectly thinkable for him to be a target of kidnapping. In particular, since this place was a provincial town that was distant from the capital, and the security system too, speaking of which one, was put together centring on Valeria's party, this was probably the ideal chance for the kidnapper.

"...Is there also a pattern where you don't consider our safety to be first?"

"Should I call it "Amaddo's national interest"... ma, if our Crown Prince is present, he'd probably give an order like this"

"What's that?"

"If His Highness had come, perhaps he'd tell us to rescue that His Excellency

and then amply sell a favour. I individually think that that's better too"

"However—", Dimitar looked at Karin.

"If it's only me and you, it'll be all right even if I decide and make you follow me, but Rudbeck-geika is also here after all. Discuss by both Your Eminences and decide. —You're fine with that, right, Glasses?"

"That "Glasses" way of calling me may not be nice~"

"Then I'll attach a "chan""

"A, ano~ ...Dimi-san?"

"I don't intend to listen to your opinion from the beginning. Do shut yourself away in the toilet"

"N, no way!"

"Be quiet. Even if you shake your body with a "furu furu", it doesn't look cute. Or rather, the metallic sound is nothing but jarring on the ears"

Kicking Bettina's body lightly with his boots that had increased its strength due to metal plates, Dimitar gazed at Valeria and party as if hurrying for a decision.

"W, what shall we do, Karin? What shall we do?"

"Even if I'm told "what shall we do"... I'm sorry, try to think about it calmly, Valeria"

Karin pointed at Petra and then explained clearly in an easy-to-understand manner.

"In the current situation, it's impossible to prepare a carriage, isn't it? Therefore, in order to pursue the criminal who had kidnapped His Excellency, we've no choice but to leave Petra who can't ride a horse here"

"Ah, I see"

Valeria and Karin, even if there were no horses, could move at a considerate speed if they used their magic, and Bettina could also follow them. But nevertheless, it felt pitiful to leave only Petra here.

"Dimitar, what's the best thing to do in order to move the fastest in the

current situation?"

When Valeria asked so, Dimitar put his hand on his slender chin and nodded after opening his eyes wide as if he was slightly surprised.

"That's right... ma, there's the pattern of me running and pursuing by myself. If it becomes a very long distance pursuit drama, a horse is indispensable no matter what though"

"It's unacceptable that it's you alone! Since we'll be braving dangers and selling a favour, it's no good if we don't properly make it into an "Amaddo's Dominas surpass Haiderota's Dominas" that sort of composition!"

"...Did you eat something bad?"

"Hai?"

"Iya... the you of tonight is saying nothing but relatively decent things"

"If that's the case, you can just praise me honestly, right!"

Although she angrily folded her arms, she didn't feel bad somehow.

"Well then, Dimitar and I, and the other is Bettina..."

"Iya, it's better to leave Gacha Pink behind"

"Eh~? Why? I won't say that I'm sleepy anymore!"

"Since we don't know how much distance the pursuit drama will become or how much time it'll take, the possibility of the cartridge becoming empty on the way can also exist. If you become unable to move, there won't be a pursuit or anything. Besides, this person will immediately say indecent topics and hold us back"

"It's not an indecent topic! I really want to pee only!"

"Anyway, we can't take such a you along with us and carry out a long distance pursuit drama. You'll be the house-sitter"

Dimitar then looked at Karin, seemingly wanting to say that he wanted to hear her opinion.

"...If Valeria is fine with it, I also don't mind though"

"Then it's decided. Karin and Petra will assist with extinguishing the fire and... the medical treatment if there are wounded people. It feels uneasy if it's just that plump-chan somehow"

"Understood"

"And then, Bettina—eto"

"Why did you hesitate to speak there!?"

"Iya, after all... is there physical labour, I wonder?"

"You can let Gacha Pink retrieve the horses that had escaped into the entire town. —You've also become familiar with the treatment of horses in your own way already, I think"

When Dimitar interrupted the conversation from the side, Bettina clapped her hands and shouted with exultation.

"Hai, I understand! If so, I'll do my best too~!"

"Then, I'll leave the rest to you"

Dimitar stepped over the window frame and went out to the garden.

Amidst the darkness, members who carried torches were coming and going, appearing busy. Everyone was becoming restless to the extent that it was slightly doubtful whether the division of roles into "people who would extinguish the fire" and "people who would stand guard" was properly done. However, Valeria and party weren't questioned by anyone even though they came out to the garden because of that.

"...So, what should we do specifically—"

Just when Valeria started to say so, her body was pulled by a strong force.



The ones who had set fire to the stable might have been the kidnappers. If a fire rose, it'd simply fall into chaos here, and furthermore they'd (*Haiderota's people*) have to set the horses free whether they wanted to or not. As well as making them use part of their manpower for the sake of extinguishing the fire, it was a rather annoying move to prevent pursuit on horses.

Conversely speaking, there was no doubt that the thieves would use horses and try to escape in one breath in this interval.

When Dimitar, who had quickly activated the “Double Power (*Furigana: Force*)” magic, carried Valeria under his arm and ascended onto Tabard Inn’s roof, he jumped from there again and headed for the clock tower. The clock tower at the centre of the town, as much as one could roughly see, was the tallest structure in this Klutoreto. If it was from that top, a wide field of vision including the outside of the town could probably be obtained.

"He—!"

Although Valeria began to utter a cramped scream at the sudden matter, he didn’t intend to slow down his speed. Jumping from roof to roof lightly, Dimitar then jumped up to the top of the clock tower.

"!"

There was a preceding visitor on the steeple where there shouldn’t be anyone.

"Di, Diaghilev-geika...?"

Valeria who was being carried on the shoulder by Dimitar murmured as if she was surprised.

"Costacurta-geika and Richternach-kyou—why are the both of you here?"

"It’s because the view is good. Diaghilev-geika also thought of the same thing, right? ...We’ll help you"

"....."

Clotilde, who had knitted her brows for a moment, unexpectedly bowed in silence only without telling them to return to their rooms.

"—Did you see something?"

"Nothing except the town’s lights"

Setting the inside of the town aside, it didn’t seem that the thieves who had escaped to the outside of the town would gallop horses without any light. There was neither a moon nor a star tonight due to the clouds covering the sky, and

the darkness was deep to the extent that nothing could be seen in the blink of an eye if one left the town.

If so, only the small amount of light which the thieves shone on their feet might be the sole clue to finding them.

"...Have they already escaped far away to the extent where even the light of their torches couldn't be seen—"

Clotilde muttered, looking frustrated. It seemed that this woman also couldn't suppress her emotions completely to the degree that they had thought.

When Dimitar let Valeria off nearby,

"If that's the case, they might be found if we try to view from a slightly higher place"

"A higher place...?"

"Oi, you, take a look"

"He?"

Grabbing the right hand of Valeria who was looking blankly, he faced the night sky and flung her with all his strength. Clotilde opened her eyes wide in surprise and alternately looked at Valeria, who danced in mid-air, and Dimitar.

"W, w, what are you doing all of a sudden—!?"

"It's variously troublesome, so I'll omit the explanation, but ma, this is our way of doing things"

It was getting troublesome to continue feigning friendliness as well, and Dimitar returned to his usual tone and smiled with a "nii".

"Ah, ah! That way! Over there! There's a light moving in the pitch-dark centre!"

Valeria, who had created a wind in the empty sky and somehow adjusted her posture, then pointed at the other side of the darkness and shouted. That white arm was pointing at the north of the town—or perhaps one should say "slightly northeast". If the map of Klutoreto which Dimitar knew was accurate, there was only one road stretching in that direction.

"—All right"

Dimitar re-activated his “Double Power” magic, aimed at Valeria who was falling slowly and jumped.

"...With this, if it's your mistake in vision, I can't laugh, you know?"

"I, i, if you didn't fling me all of a sudden, I could have prepared myself mentally a bit more! Or rather, it isn't a mistake in my vision!"

"If that's the case, then it's fine"

Dimitar, who had caught Valeria in the air, made her cling onto his back and pulled Jagieruka out. The magic crest's radiance extended from his right elbow towards Jagieruka's blade, and the enormous magic power manifested as a violent gale.

"—We're jumping!"

The wind which Dimitar had brought forth naturally pushed the bodies of the two people who were falling. The place where Dimitar, who had received the wind and earned a distance in one breath, landed next was the top of the gate of the rampart that was built on the outer-most perimeter of Klutoreto.

"Don't bite your tongue!"

Using the newly created wind as a cushion and softening their landing's impact, and then jumping down to the ground immediately, Dimitar started to run. Naturally, no sort of light could be seen in their path. Their route was weaving their way through the inside of the wheat fields and continuing towards the north; after that, a dense forest was lying in wait.

"...To be visible from above probably means that the thieves haven't entered that forest yet at that point in time"

"I mean, it isn't necessarily so that that light is the thieves in the first place, is it?"

"...Don't carelessly say things that might deny our actions from the foundation"

Although Valeria said so, that possibility was low. Klutoreto was a town that held a population of close to 10,000, and there were many amusement quarters

where people would make merry and noise after sunset too; at any rate, the king's cousin, Sigibert, and the four Dominas were sojourning today. Naturally, since going out at night was restricted to guard the important people, if there were people carrying torches and wandering aimlessly, it could already be viewed as rebellion elements disregarding the order of Haiderota's royal family.

"...Ma, it doesn't seem that the other party are kidnappers who would do this for mere money"

"What do you mean?"

"The one who was kidnapped is the king's cousin, you know? Furthermore, the ones who were sojourning together with him are Amaddo and Haiderota's Dominas. They won't avoid the capital punishment if they failed in their crime and were captured, and even if it went smoothly, they'd be pursued as wanted men until they die"

Certainly, if they made Sigibert into a hostage, they might be able to get an enormous ransom. However, the risk and return didn't counterbalance. If money was simply their objective, there were as many more lucrative methods of earning it as they liked.

"Since they kidnapped the king's cousin to the extent of braving this much danger, their objective isn't money. Something like revenge that stemmed from profound grudge... maa, if we think realistically, he might be a hostage for pushing through some political demand"

"Maybe. Though he's like a gentleman who gets carried away easily and seems to perpetrate various things, I can't think of that His Excellency doing things to the extent that he'd be resented by the people—"

When he was having such an exchange with Valeria who was on his back, the sounds of hooves approached from behind.

"Both of you! The horse!"

When they looked back over their shoulders, they could see Clotilde, who had straddled a horse, leading an unburdened horse and coming this way.

"This will be helpful. ...It looks like it'll become a long distance pursuit drama"

Without decreasing his speed, Dimitar jumped onto the horse while carrying Valeria on his back. However, the horse was unperturbed at that impact. As one would expect, the military country, Haiderota, had been gathering strong warhorses.

"Near the clock tower, Her Eminence's follower just—the pink one"

"Ah, Gacha Pink?"

"...That person has that kind of name?"

"That's wrong! She properly has a name called "Bettina"!"

"Anyway, since that person just gathered the horses that had escaped... I was saved the trouble at any rate"

"Diaghilev-geika"

Skilfully moving Valeria who was on his back to his front, Dimitar then asked Clotilde.

"Do you have some knowledge of the thieves?"

"....."

"You have, right?"

"Most likely—"

Clotilde momentarily held her breath and then muttered like she was squeezing it out.

"—They're the subordinates of Yururogu"



In terms of society, dinner time had passed long ago. If it was as usual, this was the period of time when it was inevitable that his stomach would be empty, but maybe because of the tension, today's Borha completely didn't feel hungry. Although even if he ate something, he probably wouldn't grasp the taste decently.

In the evening, Borha who had visited the Finance Minister, Kaparos-kyou, who was on friendly terms with his home's older brother, told him about the conversation which he was made to hear from his younger brother as it was.

Kaparos-kyou, who had been listening to that conversation with a serious expression, told Borha that he'd return immediately and temporarily went off to somewhere, but when he came back shortly, he took Borha out from his office.

"Where in the world am I being taken along to?" The place that Borha who was somewhat on the verge of becoming uneasy was guided to was surprisingly, the king's office where King Jeffren Francesc and the four elder statesmen mustered. Although Borha was directly called out to by the king before because his daughter was inaugurated as a Dominas, it was as if the atmosphere was different from that time. All the ministers were similarly grim-faced, but only the king was showing a fearless, to the extent of brazen, smile which was cheerful in some respects and resting his chin in his hands at the chief seat of the huge table. Even if it wasn't Borha, one couldn't help but become tensed in this atmosphere.

Then, Borha, who was made to speak of the subject from just now again, without being ordered to leave, was allowed to sit quietly at the foot of the table and had been shown the emergency meeting of Amaddo's governing body the whole time.

"—Yururogu buying up large quantity of grains at this time is the best evidence that a large-scale battle is approaching soon. If it becomes so, there's no opponent other than Haiderota, Your Majesty"

Military Minister Garido, who had ran through battlefields together with the king, then repeated in a deep voice.

"It isn't impossible that those people's family quarrel will spill over here. For the sake of protecting both Her Eminences as well, we should promptly send out our army"

"Garido-kyou... as one would expect, isn't that too impertinent?"

Home Minister, Kamunyas-kyou, wiped his sweat and pacified Garido-kyou.

"It isn't decided that Yururogu and Haiderota will enter a state of war yet—"

"It'll be too later after they enter!"

"I, iya, nevertheless..."

"That's right... first of all, the fact that Yururogu had moved its army towards Haiderota isn't confirmed. We only know that Yururogu seems to be gathering provisions at this time.... Secondly, even if the fact that Yururogu had moved its army could be confirmed, unless there's a reinforcement request from Haiderota's side or anything, we can't cross the national border and send in our army..."

Foreign Minister, Barzari-kyou, supplemented Kamunyas-kyou's opinion in a hoarse voice while wiping the lens of his spectacles.

"Ho, hora! Isn't Barzari-kyou saying it too, Garido-kyou!"

"Nu..."

Garido-kyou, who had the loudest voice and the biggest physique among the four elder statesmen, was in fact the youngest among the four people. Conversely, Barzari-kyou, who was the oldest, was a pillar of Amaddo who had successively held important posts since the time of the previous generation. As one would expect, it seemed that Garido-kyou also couldn't go against that Barzari-kyou head-on.

"In, in the first place, if we do such a thing, it can turn into a war between our country and Haiderota this time, you know? If our country and Haiderota sever our relation, won't the alliance collapse! B, besides, I also don't think that the understanding of the surrounding countries could be obtained—"

"The number one problem is... the matter of our country being interposed between formidable enemies called "Haiderota" in the north and "Bigerou" in the south.... Looking strategically, this isn't a good plan..."

"Mu...! If, if that's the case, I think that we should line up our country's elite soldiers at the border at least so that they can rush in even at once!"

"Iya iya iya, even that alone is bad, right! In, in this situation, taking military movements that will stir up Haiderota is..."

Kamunyas-kyou glanced at Borha fleetingly and continued hesitantly.

"...T, the safety of both our country's Her Eminences depends entirely on Haiderota's move right now—"

"In the first place, why did we even send two Dominas to Haiderota at a time like this!? Why is the Head Director who insisted so not here!?"

"...Don't say it that way, Barjol"

Very intimately calling out to the minister of the armed struggle faction who had angrily struck the table, the king smiled wryly.

"The one who suggested it was Orvieto, but the one who ordered them to do it was this me. If that's the case, then I'm responsible. ...Don't make me say such an obvious thing now"

"However... Your Majesty, aren't you being too soft on Head Director since the past—"

"Stop that as well now"

The king, who had destroyed his countenance with an even more wry smile, undid resting his chin in his hands and stood up, and then looked back at the huge tapestry that was hung on the rear wall. It was an article where a picture map of the continent with Amaddo as the centre was woven, and according to what Borha had heard, it was said that whenever Amaddo's territory increased or the situation between countries changed greatly, the king would immediately have a new tapestry woven to match it.

"Ma... I'm angry, but rules are rules. Our country, which is called the "leading power", breaking the rules first will set a bad example to the surroundings"

"Your Majesty! Then—"

"Make the preparations to mobilise the army. However, don't move yet. When Yururogu really moves, and in addition, Haiderota comes to say "please lend us a hand", we shall loan it at a price as high as possible"

"However, not doing anything until then is also..."

"I didn't say that we wouldn't do anything though"

The king, who had been putting his hands on his waist and looking up at the map, gazed at the Foreign Minister,

"First, we'll inform those people of Yururogu's movement under the pretence of kindness. Ma, even if we don't inform them, even Haiderota might have

sensed that movement about this time, but this will become a pretext to send in an emissary"

"As one would expect, Your Majesty, that's an ingenious idea.... Let's work out the draft of the personal letter at once. ...However, as far as such an important task is concerned, who should we make to be the emissary..."

"I, indeed. This role requires going to Haiderota's capital, and together with confirming the situation that both Her Eminences are placed in, diplomatic negotiations with the government there according to things and circumstances as well..."

"If so, Your Majesty, entrust here to me!"

Although Garido-kyou stood up packed with vigour, if they appointed such a hot-blooded ex-military person to be the ambassador plenipotentiary, the calm discussion might become a fist fight. When Borha was oozing cold sweat on his forehead at the unpleasant premonition, Kaparos-kyou, who had hardly ever open his mouth until then, raised his hand while stroking his white beard.

"May I, Your Majesty?"

"N?"

"Should I say that it's very economical... I'm thinking whether it's reasonable or not"

"What is it?"

"The Crown Prince, who had led the Seal Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Tanpries Aegis*) and escorted both Her Eminences, should still be close to the national border. In this case, how about entrusting it to His Highness?"

"To Isaac?"

"Though the personal letter can be prepared at once, it'll take money and time to elect and send out a delegation from now. That being the case, if we've His Highness wait for orders at a nearby town for the time being, and deliver the personal letter there, and then have him head for Aurillac immediately—"

"This isn't a problem of money and time, right, Kaparos-kyou! I don't have objection to His Highness becoming the ambassador, but is it fine to decide

something so serious with only that kind of point of view?"

"I didn't decide it by that alone in particular, but... Your Majesty, may I make a slightly impolite expression?"

"I don't mind"

"Well then... I shall say it frankly; if Garido-kyou, not to mention us four elder statesmen, goes as an ambassador, Haiderota will be vigilant more than necessary, and we might be confined before entering Aurillac. However, um... if this is His Highness, Haiderota will also probably happily look down on him, so it's unexpectedly possible to enter the capital without difficulty, I think—"

It was certainly an impolite expression. However, the king, without even a look that his feeling was particularly hurt even though he heard that, nodded as if it seemed interesting instead.

"That's true... Isaac has Orvieto's son and Lindegoa's successor, and that may be better than spending time in choosing people. Besides, in case it really does become the worst situation, an ordinary delegation can't be the girls' guards"

While tapping the table rhythmically with a "gon gon", the king narrowed his eyes quietly. By doing so, he might be collecting his thoughts inside his mind. The four ministers also kept their mouths shut and seemed to be waiting for the king's subsequent words.

"...All right, let's go with that"

"Good gracious... it looks like today will be a sleepless night"

Barzari-kyou stood up first with a sigh mixed in.

"Sorry, to have work you old people so hard"

"If this is because of work, then..."

"Garido-kyou, send an express messenger to Isaac and prevent him from leaving while Barzari-kyou is drawing up the personal letter. Explain the circumstances properly too, all right?"

"I will!"

"Kaparos-kyou will discuss with Kamunyas-kyou and appropriately choose a

present at your own discretion to have Isaac hold onto. Properly take into consideration the matter of our country's honour as well"

"Acknowledged"

Receiving the king's instructions, the four elder statesmen started to move respectively. It seemed that there was neither day nor night for the important people who worked in the centre of the country.

Setting that aside, when Borha who had thought "what should I do?" was looking around restlessly, his eyes met the king's.

"—Oh, thank you for your hard work, Costacurta-kyou. Countermeasures were completed without being delayed due to your information. You've my gratitude"

"N, not at all! Don't mention it!"

Springing to his feet, Borha bowed very deeply.

"You're probably worried about your daughter, but ma, I'd like you to leave here to us"

"Ha, hai"

"Your daughter, who is the head of the Costacurta House, is also a distant relative to me. I intend to devote all my power so that she can return to the country safely, but... since she's also a Dominas at the same time, it's also possible that I must get her to fulfil that obligation. Be prepared for that"

"Eh...? That, w, what does that—"

Borha, whose uneasiness had returned suddenly at the king's words, unintentionally asked a question in return with an impolite manner of speaking.

"Iya, there's no deep meaning. Don't mind it"

The king, who had shaken his head exaggeratedly, joined his hands together behind his back and left the office calmly.

"....."

Borha, who was left behind in the office alone, stared at the tapestry which was hung on the wall in a daze.



Although Amaddo called that “country” “Yururogu” for convenience, strictly speaking, Yururogu was the former sub-capital of Haiderota.

The capable, eldest and illegitimate son and the incompetent, second and legitimate son; the Haiderota’s throne succession war which stemmed from the matter of the king passing away without clearly deciding who to make into his successor, because of the illegitimate child’s side occupying the north of Yururogu and giving a declaration of independence, plunged into a rigour state for a while. Afterwards, as Haiderota was divided into the south and north, both parties claimed legitimacy and had been repeating sporadic clashes until now.

The various countries of the alliance—for the sake of differentiating it from the legitimate lineage’s South Haiderota—called North Haiderota which made the illegitimate child its king “Yururogu”. It was due to another reason besides the justifiable one of the south side being the legitimate lineage that various countries such as Amaddo recognised South Haiderota as legitimate; they probably pleasantly thought that the incompetent, legitimate child of the south reuniting Haiderota would become a benefit to their own countries in the distant future.

In any case, South Haiderota, which was recognised by each country of the alliance as it being legitimate, requested not to recognise North Haiderota as a country and not to have official diplomatic relations with it, and each country also agreed to that. Thus, North Haiderota was referred to as “Yururogu’s rebel army” by the main Haiderota.

—And then, such a situation had been continuing for nearly 100 years already. Both the brothers, who were born from different mothers and had divided the country, were already dead, and until the present that had become the grandchild or great-grandchild’s generation, there was completely no sign of the country uniting into one.

"...This is an embarrassing story, but Haiderota’s worldly matters are stabilising right now while in this divided state. After all, to the people of the lower classes, as long as their every day doesn’t change greatly, the country being divided or not has nothing to do with them. ...In fact, it appears that

interaction on the populace level has been continuing without changing from before"

Clotilde explained with a sigh mixed in.

The small flame which was burning at the fingertip of her left hand that Valeria had held up over her head was pushing aside the darkness just a little from the front of the horses that they were riding fast. Although they had entered the forest and time had passed considerably, the backs of the thieves which Valeria's party were pursuing were yet to be seen.

Instead, rain was beginning to fall tonight as well.

"However, the personages of the royal families won't be like that. Until either one defeats one of the two, they probably will never stop the battle"

"Then, this too, is a part of that—battle?"

Given the circumstances, choosing every single word and continuing a polite conversation was troublesome, and Valeria also followed Dimitar and cast off the innocence that she had been feigning. Although she might end up with explaining it afterwards, this way was quicker now.

"Sigibert is the cousin of the current king, right?"

Perhaps even adding "kakka" and "heika" were troublesome now, Dimitar asked bluntly.

"His Excellency is Remi Christian-heika's cousin and at the same time, is also His Majesty's wife, Roseline-hidenka's (*Her Royal Highness*), biological younger brother"

"His throne succession rank is fifth, and he's the younger brother of the king's wife; in addition, he's the vice-minister of military affairs, huh... setting aside practical work experience, he seems to be a very excellent talented person for a hostage"

"....."

Clotilde glared at Dimitar with a "girori". However, Dimitar warding off that gaze with a nonchalant air, lightly jerked his chin and gestured towards the ground.

"If this is a “political kidnapping drama”, he probably won’t be killed unless there’s something very serious. If we can catch up with them, we might be able to rescue him safely"

Due to the rain that had begun to fall, several traces of horses’ hooves were carved into the muddy ground. As expected, the thieves were surely escaping on this route with horses.

Clotilde looked at Valeria fleetingly,

"...Can Costacurta-geika use healing magic?"

"Eh? Ah, yes, maa, moderately"

"If that’s the case, I’d like you to take care of Sigibert-kakka at the critical moment"

"Hai?"

"I don’t have magic crests that can use healing magic—"

"Yours are completely devoted to offensive, huh... they certainly seems so"

Dimitar, who had smiled slightly, stared forwards and narrowed his eyes.

"...I can see their light. Put out the fire"

"Eh?"

"We can run relying on that light. There’s no need to inform them that we’re pursuing them"

Dimitar extended his left hand and casually crushed the flame at Valeria’s fingertip. The light which was unreliable from the beginning vanished, and the vicinity was enveloped by the darkness in one breath. In front of such an inside, an extremely small light could certainly be seen flickering.

"To have taken so much time even though we’re catching up with Haiderota’s warhorses means that theirs aren’t horses of that sort. They’re probably quite superior warhorses. That means—"

"I’ve prepared myself—"

When Clotilde drew in a breath greatly and unfastened all the buttons at the front of her military uniform like she was tearing them off, she then kicked the

horse's abdomen. Her horse increased its speed slightly, established a lead over the horse that Valeria rode and went out to the front.

"Oi—"

Dimitar's cheeks became stiff and he tried to call Clotilde to stop, but her horse rapidly accelerated. As expected, it seemed that her horse was less fatigued than Valeria's horse that the pair was on.

Clotilde took off her military uniform and wrapped it around her waist, and then caused her bare right arm to shine in silver and raised it overhead.

"I shall make those people fall down! In case His Excellency is wounded, please give treatment to him hurriedly!"

"Oi, wait!? What will we do if he receives an injury that can't be healed even with magic!?"

"Wabu!?"

Dimitar casually pushed Valeria's head down and covered her from above.

Immediately after that, an explosive flame, which was of the extent of blowing away the surroundings' darkness completely, exploded.

"!"

The explosive flame which Clotilde had created evaporated the raindrops and flew, attacking the thieves in front. As might be expected from an offensive-magic expert, it was a considerably strong "Fire Bullet (*Furigana: Blast*)".

However, at the next moment when they saw a group of men and horses from the thieves' group reducing their speed, a small figure of a person who was on that horse turned towards Valeria's party and shot explosive flame that was not at all inferior to Clotilde's.

"! Stop, Your Eminence!"

The two explosive flames collided head-on, emitted incandescent shock waves in every direction and then disappeared. If she was late in pulling her horse's reins and slowing down her speed, she might have plunged directly into the hot wind from the front and received large scalds on her whole body.

The rain and damp night air dispersed the hot wind, and when the flash which had been flickering in their retinas faded, what remained there were all kinds of trees that let black smoke rise up in smoulders, weak embers and a scorched ground—and then, putting the centre of the explosion between them and facing Valeria's party were seven horse-riding silhouettes.



Valeria, who had noticed that several horseback riders were going away on

that other side, spoke in a low voice.

"They intend to prevent us from leaving"

"It seems so... those people who had gone ahead took His Excellency along, huh—"

The seven-man group who had obstructed the path of Valeria's party—all its members were dressed in completely black mantles—didn't appear to have placed the kidnapped Sigibert on the backs of their horses.

"We'll cut across"

Dimitar pulled out the sword at his waist and kicked the horse's abdomen. Clotilde also galloped her horse almost simultaneously. It looked like silver radiance dwelt on both her arms so that she could make magic explode at any time.

On the other side, the thieves also tried to attack here again and galloped their horses.

"—Step back, swines!"

Clotilde's right hand extended forwards and an enormous wind blade flew. The seven men and horses split to the left and right to evade it. Valeria's horse ran in towards the space that was created there.

However—there was only one person who didn't fly to the right or left.

"!?"

When Valeria had her breath taken away in surprise, that conspicuously small silhouette kicked the horse's saddle and jumped.

"! Hold tight!"

At the end of those words, Dimitar's body temperature disappeared from Valeria's back.



It was as if it was agility similar to that of a gibbon which inhabited the jungles of the southern countries.

In the next moment when she kicked the horse's saddle and jumped into the

air, that small silhouette was before Dimitar's eyes. It was already too near to brandish Jagieruka and intercept her. Seeing a sharp knife being gripped in the opponent's right hand, just by protecting Valeria instantly was the best that he could do.

"Gu...u!"

His field of vision reversed with a "gurun", and a sharp pain ran in his chest. He barely understood that he was grappled by the enemy and had tumbled down from the horse only.

"Dimitar!?"

He heard Valeria who had clung onto the horse's neck calling out to him, but unfortunately, he didn't have the room to be worrying about her. Dimitar, who had forcibly kicked the enemy off and placed his left hand on the ground and somehow adopted ukemi (*art of falling safely*), without even checking the surroundings well, shouted in a loud voice.

"The both of you go as it is! They'll make off with His Excellency!"

"D, don't say absurd things!"

Although it seemed that Clotilde had cut across in one breath and pursued the escaped thieves, Valeria—what was she thinking—jumped down from the horse and hastily came rushing over next to Dimitar.

"You—"

Dimitar, who had stood up slowly, glanced at his chest and clicked his tongue, seemingly annoyed.

"Why didn't you go together with Her Eminence there!?"

"T, that's because—ah, hora, I can't manage such a violent horse by myself!"

"...What's that? That unnatural excuse?"

"That's not an excuse! —!?"

Valeria, who had shouted back at Dimitar's words, immediately gasped and became speechless.

"Y, you... that—"

"Even if you fall from the horse midway, leaving here together with Her Eminence there would have been better—"

On Dimitar's chest, a deep red wound ran in a straight line just below his collarbone. It was because he was forcefully injured when he fell down from the horse just now. If Dimitar didn't reflexively bend backwards, the thief's knife might have slit Dimitar's windpipe.

"—"

It was a deep cut to the extent that a part of his collarbone could be peeked at, but luckily or unluckily, he didn't feel that pain now.

Instead, there was a strange sensation of his whole body becoming cool all of a sudden.

The thieves who had allowed Clotilde's breakthrough were surrounding Dimitar and Valeria before they knew it. In the middle of that encirclement, Dimitar's party faced that small silhouette.

"Just a minute... I'll treat your wound with magic now—"

"It's fine. Preserve your magic without wasting it"

"It's not wasteful!"

"It's fine, so run away if there's a chance"

Interrupting Valeria's words, Dimitar muttered indifferently.

"...Eh?"

"That person will be troublesome, you know..."

The small silhouette which was kicked off by Dimitar with all his strength lay spread-eagled on the mud; she lay down as it was for a short while, but before long, when she bent both her legs to hold them in her arms, she applied force and got up with a "hyokon" from that posture.

"—"

Valeria became speechless again. It was probably because Valeria had personally seen her.

It was certainly an existence that should be called a "girl"—a "little girl".

Chapter 6: You Don't Acknowledge Me

In the southeast of Amaddo, there was once a kingdom which was affiliated to the “**Holy Alliance** (***Furigana: Riga Santourear***)” called “Romarikku”. However, at the end of twists and turns, Romarikku was annexed by Amaddo and now remained as nothing but the name of one provincial city of Amaddo.

Due to such a sequence of events, the self-reliance trait was strong in Romarikku province, and Amaddo's government had been racking its brains on the treatment since the olden days.

Conversely, Haiderota also had a past of annexing a member nation of the alliance called “Baragan”, and including it into its own territory. The current Haiderota had a two-person share of the possession right of Dominas because one of them belonged to Baragan.

Presently, the north of Haiderota which was ruled by the rebel army roughly coincided with the territory of the former Baragan. From that start, the animosity towards Haiderota's government **firmly** remained among the people of this region.

It was certainly a little girl.

Casually tearing off the black mantle that had gotten dirty in mud and making her neck sound a “kokiri kokiri” was, possessing hair that was long to the degree of reaching her ankles and skin, which had faintly emerged in the very dim light, that was white to the extent of abnormal, a little girl with melancholic eyes.

The plenitude of exposure, which one could see nothing but cloth wrapping around the circumference of her flat chest and waist in very small amount, made one think of Valeria's appearance when she used magic, but because she was short and lacking variation of body line, she looked much more younger than Valeria.

However, Dimitar, whose chest was greatly cut open, understood well more than anyone that it was impossible that she was an innocent little girl according

to that appearance.

It wasn't because he was rained on, but because he was purely shuddering that Dimitar felt his back muscles shivering.

"...She's not a normal kid"

Rather than conveying to Valeria who was beside him, perhaps Dimitar muttered to warn himself.

It was probably this girl who had cancelled out Clotilde's magic just now. Thinking about that, he immediately understood that her magic skill was quite something. And then, even if one thought about the matter of her managing a large warhorse with this small body, grappling with Dimitar at the moment when they met and swinging her knife, it was possible to say that that agility put professional soldiers to shame.

However, what was the most troublesome was that she could kill people as if she was breathing. Despite aiming at the human body's vitals and swinging her knife, she neither released killing intent deliberately nor had any hesitation. It was better to face and fight her from the front; he might hardly survive if that sort of person made a surprise attack on him in the dark.

"...Though I'm concerned about the number of people being numerous, you'll have to take on those people in our surroundings"

Brushing his forelock that had absorbed the rain and sweat and became heavy upwards, Dimitar spoke.

"And then, run away if there's a chance"

"Look here—"

"It's fine to link up with Clotilde and rescue His Excellency or return to the town and call for reinforcement. ...At any rate, move away from that kid"

"Like I said, I can't do that—"

"You definitely can't win"

Dimitar casually made Valeria who had doggedly opposed him obeyed by force. It was because he believed that that was an undeniable fact.

If it was just putting a distance from right in front and shooting magic at each other—in Dimitar's opinion—Valeria might win. However, in a one-on-one battle where anything goes, no matter how, Valeria probably had no chance of winning. She'd be approached in the blink of an eye and stabbed deeply once with the knife, and it'd end with that.

"It's not because you're weak"

While understanding that it wasn't any kind of consolation, Dimitar added.

"It's simply that... she's just merciless"

Differentiating the two girls' positions was most likely just that one point.

Valeria was gentle. It might be fine even if one paraphrased it as "timidity". She was afraid of herself being wounded, and at the same time, she was afraid of injuring others. If one were to make an extreme argument, she couldn't kill people.

However, that girl could kill people. She probably wasn't afraid of herself being wounded either.

Therefore, Valeria couldn't win against that girl. Just by shortening the distance and making one stab to Valeria's vitals while she was hesitating, the girl would become the living victor, and Valeria would be transformed into the defeated that could die.

"...Leave her to me"

"Dimitar!?"

While hearing that voice at his back, Dimitar slashed at the girl.

"Do, dodo—"

The girl, who was looking at Dimitar fixedly with upturned eyes, seemed to be trying to say something in a faltering tone, but it didn't become a clear word.

Instead, the somewhat large knife attacked Dimitar. The edge of the knife which had drawn a strange curve caused Jagieruka's blade to smoothly slide on it, and Dimitar's slash was easily warded off. It was the brilliance of the skill that he wanted to show to the bonbons of the Seal Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Tanpries Aegis*).

However, he didn't have the free time to be feeling admiration.

Patterns of pale purple phosphorescence emerged closely packed on the girl's bare white stomach. They were considerably high-density and complex magic crests (*Furigana: Hierateika*), but Dimitar who was a Hiera Glaphicos could immediately understand those were for using what sort of magic.

"It's—like that, huh!?"

Dimitar took a distance against the girl instantly and thrust Jagieruka into the ground. Removing the gauntlet that was put on his left arm in substitute for a shield, he concentrated his consciousness into both arms. Separate magic crests on each arm shone, and Dimitar's whole body was filled with a new power.

Then, the girl came charging towards him at high speed.

"!"

Pulling Jagieruka out quickly, he repelled the girl's knife back. It was a blow that possessed an unnatural weight, but this was also within the estimation for Dimitar.

"Though you hold a huge projectile weapon..., you're the type that is similar to me, huh"

What the girl had used just now were "Double Power (*Furigana: Force*)" and "Double Speed (*Furigana: Flash*)"—magic which dramatically raised physical ability that Dimitar also frequently used.

"Oh, o-oh... oh?"

The girl, who was easily sent flying, kicked a tree trunk with both her feet, landed with a "hitari" and gazed at Dimitar quizzically. She most likely noticed that Dimitar had used the same magic as her.

The other thieves came interrupting in that opening.

"Step aside, Dimitar!"

Valeria who had come running to the side of Dimitar, who was staring at the girl, stuck her left hand out forwards. The flame arrows which the thieves had fired were entirely pulverised by Valeria's "Iron Wall (*Furigana: Rampart*)". Perhaps they were surprised at that jarring noise, the horses which were nearby

ran away into the forest, leaving behind shrill neighs.

"If you've the spare time to do something like that, then go somewhere!"

"Hey...!?"

Dimitar carried Valeria under his arm and greatly jumped backwards, but the thieves were already taking a roundabout path to there too. While it might be true that those movements were easy to grasp, he couldn't ignore the thieves who, unlike the girl, released clear killing intents either.

"Chi...!"

At almost the same time when he heard the sound of the thieves unsheathing the swords on their waists, Dimitar extended his right foot to the back while sinking his body.

"Gugo—o"

The sensation of ribs been broken was transmitted through the boots. Dimitar's back kick had probably done a direct hit on the chest of a thief at the rear. Furthermore, letting Jagieruka pass through his armpit, he did a stab with it and delivered the finishing blow.

"In, in front!"

Valeria, who was pressed down by Dimitar and had squatted down on the spot, finely scattered "Fire Bullets (*Furigana: Blast*)" towards the girl who was approaching from the front.

However, the girl weaved her way through those gaps and ran here. It was a kinetic vision that one ought to be shocked at.

"Do the rest yourself somehow!"

"Eh!?"

Dimitar grabbed the nape of Valeria's neck and flung her, and then attacked the girl. On this occasion, the other thieves wouldn't become a significant problem. Their number had decreased to some extent, and when compared to the girl, their abilities fell behind by several levels. If those people of this standard were her opponents, then Valeria should be able to defend herself as much as she liked.

However, only this girl couldn't be left alone. The worst case was this girl and Valeria squaring off one-on-one while Dimitar was occupied with the other thieves.

Therefore, Dimitar proactively slashed at the girl of his own accord.

"—Fuu!"

Despite stepping in, the girl sank her body and evaded the point of Jagieruka that had matched her and ran horizontally. Although a tuft of her bluish-purple hair was cut and fell as if dancing, she didn't even narrow her eyes. As she stared at Dimitar with completely unshaken eyes, the girl tried to jump into Dimitar's chest.

"You're more troublesome than I imagined—!"

While stepping backwards, he thrust Jagieruka which had magic crests emerging on it into the ground. An intense cold air ran radially from there while freezing the ground.

"—?"

The girl, who had stepped on the ground that had frozen and split finely, grimaced and hurriedly jumped back. For the girl who was wearing sandals, this footing was probably unpleasant.

In that interval, Dimitar pulled out the knife that was inserted in his boots. Recalling his practice with Lucius, he assumed a stance with his legs in an L-shape. The posture of thrusting out his left hand which gripped the knife to the front with his right hand which gripped Jagieruka at the back was for opposing the girl who had come challenging him to close combat.

The girl, who had temporarily jumped to the side, kicked a tree trunk and came attacking Dimitar again.

"!"

He turned the knife which had come extending towards his face away to the side with his knife that was far more meagre when compared to that. Dimitar who had sensed that the girl tried to forcibly grapple with him as it was boldly stepped in of his own accord and struck his forehead against the girl's head.

"Aii!?"

Raising a shrill scream, the girl was blown off. Even if she obtained amazing physical ability by means of magic, only this difference in body weight wasn't covered up as expected.

Dimitar then fired magic arrows towards the girl who had rolled and bounced on the ground.

"H, H-h, how dare, you—"

Holding down her temple where blood weakly oozed, the girl swung her left hand. Similar arrows surged from those fingertips and were negated together with Dimitar's arrows. Her instantaneous reaction and speed of even using magic; even the proficient magic warriors (*Furigana: Marefikos*) of Amaddo would probably be astonished.

Dimitar kicked the ground and closed in on the girl. Taking advantage of the centrifugal force, he threw a full swing of Jagieruka. Honestly, Dimitar wasn't inclined to the composition of slashing at a young girl without going easy on her, but the sense of danger that such a cheap vacillation would become fatal had removed the limiter of his mind.

Making a "gatsun!" dull sound, Jagieruka's blade sank into the tree trunk. The girl who had jumped lightly dodged the blow striking from the side.

"You impertinent—!"

The girl landed onto Jagieruka's sword blade as it was, aimed at Dimitar's face and released a kick.

"—What!"

Blocking the girl's turning kick with his left elbow, he then grabbed that ankle immediately and swung her. If he could throw her to the ground or even into a tree trunk with that force, that'd be the best, but seeing the girl raising her knife overhead, Dimitar threw her out at once.

If they continued such a hand-to-hand combat, it'd probably cause shortness of breath to the girl first eventually. By borrowing the power of magic, the girl could also obtain a speed and power on par with Dimitar's, but to stand on the

same place as Dimitar, the originally powerless girl must push herself to the limit more than Dimitar. That was to say, she must be saddled with more mental burdens than Dimitar.

Of course, this shrewd girl should have realised that. If so, the girl might not aim for a hand-to-hand combat that would slowly exhaust her, but a short-term decisive battle by means of flashy magic. If that could be predicted, he could make the battle progress to his advantage.

The girl, who had rolled in the mud with a “goro goro”, made magic crests emerge on both her bare arms while standing up.

However, he wouldn't give her the time to let them transform into real magic.

"Excuse me for my manners being bad—"

Dimitar hooked the corpse of a thief which was lying down close by onto Jagieruka and flung it towards girl.

"....."

Immediately after a sound of clicking tongue was faintly heard, the girl put up a rampart around and before her. The corpse which had lost the strength of its limbs was sent flying with a “gunyan”, and the mud turned into sprays due to that aftermath and scattered flashily.

Seizing that opportunity, Dimitar shortened the distance between him and the girl.

"Y, y-y... y, you—!"

Although the girl directed her right hand which was coloured by magic crests towards Dimitar, prior to the flame arrows surging from those fingertips, the side of Dimitar throwing his knife at her was faster.

"Tsu—"

The knife that Dimitar, who had acquired a physical ability that far surpassed an ordinary man's, threw was even faster than the arrow of a strong composite bow. The fact that that knife which should have been aimed at her chest was limited to just gouging her left shoulder might be because the girl had tried to reflexively avoid it.

Although that reaction was magnificent, Dimitar didn't think that she'd be killed by that. When Dimitar kicked up mud and approached the girl, he tried to drive the toe of his boots into the girl's solar plexus.

It was when he noticed through the gap of her copious hair which drooped loosely that the girl wasn't looking at him but the night sky that he sensed that it was a mistake.

"—!?"

The girl, who had held her knife in her mouth, stopped Dimitar's kicking leg with both hands, used that force and soared into the air in one breath.

In front of that dark gaze was—.



"—Be careful, Your Eminence!"

Creating wind and staying in the night sky, Valeria who had tried to send flame arrows towards the enemies on the ground opened her eyes wide at Dimitar's sharp voice.

"No way—!?"

That girl came soaring directly this way from Valeria's blind spot. Just like Valeria had always been doing, the vivid magic crest which had emerged on the girl's right leg was picking up her small body on the wind.

"Run away!"

Those following words of Dimitar brought Valeria back to reality from her surprise.

"Why do I have to—run away!?"

Raising her eyebrows, she raised her right hand overhead. The red magic crest which ran from the top of her shoulder to her fingertips in an instant was reflecting Valeria's will and flickering strongly.

She understood that the opponent was an unknown magic warrior who possessed frightening power. She understood that when the girl negated Clotilde's magic at the beginning. However, she was angry at being told to

escape since she absolutely couldn't win by herself. If it was magic—if it was shooting magic at each other, she wouldn't lose no matter who the opponent was.

She wanted to make him—not the girl before her eyes, but Dimitar—realised that here and now.

"I'm not conceited! This is a matter of pride! A Dominas of Amaddo running away without having a match with a child whom nobody knows about is absolutely unforgivable!"

Valeria stared at the girl and directed her right hand's index finger at her.

"O, o-o-o... soo"

While muttering something in a clear voice that was quite out-of-place and gave one the impression of a small bird's chirp, the girl who had tightly grasped a knife in her right hand sidestepped it easily.

"—Eh?"

The girl evaded the red-hot flame which Valeria had staked her pride as a Dominas and shot just by twisting her body slightly.

The flame which had lost its target impacted near Dimitar who was on the ground and transformed the surroundings into a momentary midsummer. From the middle of that dazzling sunlight, the girl who had dishevelled her hair in the hot wind came rushing in like it was nothing.

"—Hi, ii!?"

The girl's knife accurately extended towards Valeria's chest. An intense pain ran on the right arm of Valeria who had protected her face at once and tried to put up a rampart around her. The point of the strange-shaped knife slid from the vicinity of her elbow to her wrist, and red blood spurted out in the dark.

"—Ah!?"

Valeria who was stiffening her whole body in pain and shock realised that rain was falling from the front of her body. Before she knew, Valeria was starting to fall.

Perhaps when she tried to use a rampart to defend herself—though it wasn't

in time in the end—her concentration of trying to continue circulating magic power to her right leg was interrupted. Due to tumbling down from the sky because of that, considering that she could escape from the girl's assassin's dagger instead, one might be able to say that she was lucky.

Of course, if the back of her head crashed into the ground as it was, she'd surely die on the spot because of a blow on the whole body or a skull fracture; even if she was breathing, she'd be easily finished off without being able to move.

When Valeria held her right hand with her left hand, circulated magic power to her right leg again and created a whirlwind, she then directed it at the ground.

"—Tte!"

Since her bottom landed on the ground with a "dosun" and that impact ended with the degree of groaning, one could also probably call that "good luck". At the least, it ended without fracturing her neck bone.

Her feeling relieved was also momentary, and the other thieves came attacking there.

"!"

"I said to run away, I'll—!"

A thief, who had pulled out the sword on his waist and came slashing, was blown off in a pose where his body bent with a "gunyan".

"Dimitar..."

"You did it again...!"

The left arm of Dimitar, who was breathing heavily while saying so, perhaps because of the flame that Valeria had shot just now, broke out in bright-red blisters like it had a severe sunburn. His blouse also had burn marks here and there.

Dimitar, who had nonetheless caused one of the thieves to become incapable of combat with one kick, lifted Valeria up with his wounded left arm and swung his sword.

"Gaa...!"

One thief scattered fresh blood and collapsed again.

"Good grief... with this, you've understood that she isn't an ordinary kid, right!?"

Following the gaze of Dimitar who had shouted as if spitting out, Valeria looked up at the sky too.

The girl, who floated in the empty sky together with the midnight breeze, was looking down on Valeria and Dimitar and holding that knife up.

"! Dimitar! T, that knife's blade!"

"Messing around with us...!"

Distinct magic crests were emerging on the surface of the wickedly curved knife.

"—Chii"

Dimitar clicked his tongue. Perhaps he had understood immediately as well.

It was the magic which was shot from that knife that had negated Clotilde's magic.

That was also a kind of "Magic Motion Sword (*Furigana: Espada Marefika*)".

"Hey!"

The remaining thieves came slashing at Valeria's party, who was distracted by overhead, in one breath from every direction.

"Her comrades are still here, aren't they...!"

Enduring the pain in her right arm, Valeria made her magic power converge in her left hand. Letting the "Tornado (*Furigana: Razor*)" run in a straight line, it then mowed down the enemies who came rushing in.

"Guah!"

"Gu—"

The thieves who were blown away crashed into the ground and tree trunks, and confirming that they had stopped moving, Valeria then immediately glared

up at the girl again.

She already understood the power of the magic that was shot from that knife. If she didn't cast a magic that was no less on par with it and cancel each other out, Valeria and Dimitar might be burnt pitch black here. She made her entire sensitivity converge to produce a magic of that extent.

However, the magic crests on her right arm completely couldn't be used, and above all, the pain of the wound hindered her; it took time to the extent that even she was irritated to charge up sufficient destructive power.

"Ku—!"

Beside Valeria who was grinding her teeth, Dimitar thrust his sword into the ground.

Dimitar who had taken a deep breath pointed both his hands to the sky. Those arms were completely covered by ivies of bluish-black light in the twinkling of an eye.

Those weren't the magic crests for the magic which raised physical ability that Valeria often saw.

They were extraordinarily complex magic crests—for making extra-large explosive flame magic explode—that Valeria was trying to formulate with one arm right now.

"Y... you, that sort of magic—why!?"

She had never heard that Dimitar could use a magic with such a destructive power. She had thought that the offensive magic which Dimitar could use were on the level similar to those that the army's magic warriors used at the most, and that it was also surely because he had borrowed that sword's power.



Nevertheless, if it was true that that powerful magic, similar to Valeria's,

could be used without relying on that sword, then—.

"Aren't you the one who is messing around...!"

When humans got extremely angry or excited, some strange things would be produced inside their heads, and they wouldn't feel pain temporarily—Valeria had heard said story from Karin. The current Valeria was exactly that way. The strong anger which shook her whole body had numbed the pain in her right arm; sharpening her sensitivity, she accelerated the flow of her stagnated magic power in one breath.

She heard a strange sound of “basun” above her head. That girl must have shot her magic.

However, Valeria wasn't looking at the girl anymore.

As she fixedly glared at Dimitar's profile, she made the magic which she had amassed in her right arm explode together with her anger.



One should say that it was fortunate that the rain was continuing to fall without stopping. No matter how many times they shot flashy magic of that degree, it hardly spread fire to their surroundings, and the left arm which had sustained burns could also cool immediately.

If he counted such trivial good luck one by one, then overcoming the dreary bad luck which waited beyond this might become slightly easy.

Valeria's magic, which had far exceeded Dimitar's expectation and speedily exploded, after slightly forcing that girl's magic back, cancelled each other out and scattered in night sky.

"....."

Lowering his arm that had been making the magic power converge, he grabbed Jagieruka. Dimitar, who had stared at the girl through the veil of drizzling rain, narrowed his eyes and took a step forwards.

"Te, te, i—"

Perhaps she received the aftermath of the two explosive flames that had clashed, the girl who had flown down unsteadily sustained burns on her right

hand that held the knife. It wasn't a damage to the extent of fatal, but the fact that her right arm's magic crests were sealed didn't change.

It became a situation where Valeria and the girl's right arms' magic crests couldn't be used. Even if she borrowed the power of magic, it might already be impossible for the girl to do close combat with Dimitar with one arm. Whether she knew that and had the will to fight an extended battle or not—Dimitar lightly swung Jagieruka to show that he could still use the sword with both hands.

"....."

The girl's chirp stopped, and her eyes which contained trepidation in some respects began to move hurriedly, looking around restlessly. Ironically, that was a very humane reaction that she, who should be a dreadful slaughterer who aimed at people's vitals without hesitation, showed for the first time.

"!"

Bending her body, the girl who was taking rough breaths on nearly all fours suddenly jumped up. Purple magic crests were drawn on both legs, and they created a strong wind that blew away the raindrops.

"This...!"

Valeria instantly raised her left hand overhead.

"Stop"

Grabbing the hand of Valeria who tried to make a new magic crest emerge, Dimitar sighed.

"—Leave her alone if she's withdrawing. Cornering a wild animal and receiving a desperate counterattack is also foolish"

"However...!"

"More importantly, close up your right hand's wound. You'll collapse due to excessive bleeding, you know"

Jerking his chin lightly, he made Valeria become aware of the depth of the wound that she had received. Valeria's right hand had been deeply cut open with a "zakkuri" from near the elbow to the wrist, but because of the metal

bracelet, it ended without her artery and tendon being cut. One should probably call it “luck among the misfortune”.

However, there was no guarantee that they could count another good luck like that when they further cornered the girl who was fleeing away.

"...I'll search for the horse"

Leaving Valeria who had begun to obediently treat her right arm's wound behind at the spot, Dimitar pushed through into the forest. Somehow securing one of the horses that had become frightened by the exchange of flashy magic and ran away, he returned to Valeria's original position.

Valeria, who was standing stock still in the middle of the path, held her right arm whose wound was healed and glared at Dimitar with a reproachful look. It wasn't that he didn't understand what she wanted to say somehow, but he didn't think that it was a situation where he'd be rebuked either.

Dimitar had instructed Valeria to leave here together with Clotilde. Since Valeria had disregarded that and remained in this place, what she'd experience and what she'd think here, those might be her self-responsibility.

Dimitar secured the clasp of Jagieruka's scabbard and spoke to Valeria.

"I don't think that the kid from just now will link up with her escaped comrades..., but I'm worried about Clotilde. Let's go"

"You, sa..."

"What is it? We don't have the free time for making pointless talk"

Dimitar straddled the horse and hit the front of his saddle with a “pon”, saying “get on here quickly”.

"—Or is it that you want to be scolded for disregarding my instruction again, here and now?"

"That's because—that's because you don't acknowledge me!"

"...Ha?"

"You don't acknowledge my power, right!"

Valeria shouted, her cheeks flushing bright red in the cold rain.

"I was chosen to be a Dominas! However, you don't acknowledge my power, do you!"

"Therefore, you wanted to show me? To show me that you can fight even by yourself, and if I praise you, you'd be fine with that?"

"It's not like that!"

"Ma... in reality, you weren't able to fight by yourself"

"__"

Valeria bit her lips and glared at Dimitar with eyes like she was looking at her parents' enemies.

He could tease Valeria with sound arguments until she cried here, but unfortunately, he didn't have such free time. It was unthinkable that there were other magic warriors on the level of the girl from just now, but if he thought about the possibility of the worst case, he was worried about Clotilde who had continued the pursuit alone. It'd be better to run after her quickly.

"...If Clotilde and Sigibert die, our position will conversely get worse. We'll go to see the situation"

Dimitar took a deep breath greatly and extended his left hand to Valeria.

Valeria then grasped that hand.

"...That, you're really amazing"

Valeria who had muttered in a low voice was fixedly staring at Dimitar's left arm. The magic crest from just now was still faintly remaining on the skin that had blistered in deep red.

"That is so, isn't it; you can use such a magic too! You're knowledgeable in various things, can use a sword, can mount a horse, and are always calm! Since you can be a Hiera Glaphicos, and on top of that, can even use such an amazing magic, it's natural that I'll seem like an idiot, right!? That's why you don't acknowledge me, right!? No matter how much I did my best, you absolutely won't acknowledge me!"

"...Do you want to be acknowledged by me?"

"__"

"Think carefully"

Conversely, Dimitar grasped Valeria's arm back and forcibly pulled her up onto the horse. If he waited for Valeria who had become emotional to calm down, it might take until dawn broke.

Placing Valeria on the horse in such a way as to carry her under the arm, Dimitar made the reins resound.

"—What you've been saying since a little while ago was, you want to be acknowledged by me when you've become able to kill people too, you know?"

"It's different!"

"To begin with, you couldn't see through that kid's ability. If you knew that the opponent is stronger than yourself, then you might have used the cleverness of at least performing a surprise attack secretly from under cover"

"But... such a thing, isn't something that a Dominas would do, right!? For a Dominas of Amaddo, no matter who the opponent may be, from the front—"

"Work like murder isn't requested of the Dominas of Amaddo"

"__"

The situation varied according to countries, but Dominas standing in the battlefields was something that happened occasionally, and there were examples like Clotilde's as well. However, what the current people of Amaddo were requesting of the Dominas wasn't that sort of role.

"I said that you've your role, right? Bear in mind that the surrounding people are making the efforts to protect that image. ...Don't think that children will feel intimacy towards a Dominas who has killed people and then approach her"

While speaking to Valeria who had cast her eyes down, Dimitar clearly understood. At the least, he believed that he could understand.

For the sake of strengthening the position of Amaddo that was the leader country, Orvieto had been thinking of actively sending Valeria's party to the outside. Intervention of dispute, inspection of the frontier, inspection work, and also diplomacy—in order to resolve the trouble that arose in the process, it

wouldn't always be concluded with just lip service.

Therefore, Dimitar was assigned to be Valeria's assistant. Helping Valeria and raising her reputation on one hand, Dimitar would be entirely responsible for the work that would lead to damaging her image because she did it herself. This was often the case in the world of politics.

What Orvieto was requesting of him was the role of a villain like that.

"...In the first place, when did I say that I don't acknowledge you? Saying that I don't acknowledge you who is a Dominas means finding fault with the decision of Head Director and His Majesty who had chosen you to be a Dominas, you know? I'm not foolish to that extent"

Dimitar spoke while galloping the horse.

"You've a role that the other Dominas don't, and I acknowledge that. I know that you can use every magic almost equally at a high level, and I also know that you've the desire to improve yourself more than others. ...What do you want me to acknowledge of you anymore?"

"But..."

Maybe because it had gotten wet in the rain or there were other reasons, Valeria wiped her face with the back of her hand many times, sniffled a little and muttered.

"—You're actually making fun of me, aren't you?"

"That can't be helped. It's a fact that you do foolish things"

"That... I wish you wouldn't say "foolish"!"

Valeria suddenly raised her face and hit Dimitar's arm that gripped the reins.

"—First of all, trying to use a flashy magic like you're competing with me, you're really looking down on people! Pretending that you can't use it despite being able to use even that sort of magic, you were looking at me who had gotten proud and laughing in your mind the whole time, right!?"

"If I were laughing at you, I'd look at your face and laugh openly and above board. It isn't interesting if your reaction isn't known"

"Ki—i!"

Tearing off her long hair, Valeria hit Dimitar's arm even more violently. If it was the usual, it wouldn't be very painful, but his left arm which was blistered would hurt as expected.

"Ah..."

Perhaps she had realised that like now, Valeria stopped her hand that was hitting Dimitar's arm. Dimitar then raised his lips and,

"The unrefined me can't use healing magic. I'd like to have the versatile Costacurta-geika to heal it quickly"

"Saying things that make fun of me like that again—"

Although she grumbled "butsu butsu", Valeria made a magic crest emerge on her left hand and started the treatment of the wounds on the left arm and chest of Dimitar who was clutching the reins.

"...Are (*huh/eh*)?"

"What's the matter?"

"You... did that just now, right? Ano—hora, that!"

"Don't think that you can have a conversation with just a pronoun. What do you want to say?"

"That's because, even though it was burned and the magic crests shouldn't have been usable—magic crests rose up on this arm just now too—"

"Ah, that, huh"

Thoughts of "did she realise it as expected?" and "she didn't realise it until now?" turned into a jumble, and Dimitar gave a bitter smile slightly.

"That magic crest... the truth is, I never intended to use it again"

"Eh?"

"I certainly used that sort of magic which substitutes projectile weapons by myself before. —However, I understood that I can't master it well no matter how hard I may try and decided not to use it after that"

"Can't master it...?"

"It went out of control"

Dimitar laughed at himself. It was a past that he didn't want to remember much, but it might not be bad in a self-admonition sense.

"No matter how much I injured the skin, it'd never disappear. It's futile with the degree of a blister. Even though I sustained an even more terrible burn, and the skin was completely burned hideously, this left arm's magic crest didn't disappear and didn't stop going out of control either"

"Such a thing... eh? It really exists?"

"If my story is unbelievable, then you can try asking Babel-geika next time"

"It's something that Babel-geika knows as well?"

"When this left arm went out of control previously, it was Her Eminence who helped Lucius and me. Honestly, that person is difficult to deal with, but because of just that, I'm indebted to her for my whole life"

At that moment, Dimitar, who had remembered Shakira Babel's grinning face and knitted his brows, noticed that a small light was lit ahead.

"—There she is"

In the middle of a circle of a dim light was the person in question, Clotilde Diaghilev, who held up the light and Sigibert Duevre who was placed on horseback, tied as he was; moreover, there were people in black from head to toe who had collapsed in the vicinity, not moving with so much as a twitch.

"The both of you... are safe, I see"

The one who came running was Clotilde who had noticed Dimitar's party; at this unexpected thing for her, she relaxed her mouth like she felt relieved in some respects.

"His Excellency?"

"He's safe. ...It seems that he was made to smell a medicine or something and was put to sleep only"

"As one would expect of the "White Rose of Steel""

Roughly looking, about five, six thieves had collapsed. Since she defeated the thieves who had mastered magic and swords by merely herself, Clotilde was surely a Dominas suited for combat.

Dimitar, who had carried Valeria under his arm and dismounted the horse, tore off the thieves' mantles and tore them to appropriate length, and then asked while tying them up quickly.

"Is it certain that this is the deed of Yururogu?"

"We won't know the exact things unless we try interrogating these thieves..., but there's no mistake anyway, I think. I've recollection of this sword and harness. They're the things that the rebel army is using if I remember correctly"

"Is that so..."

"Hyowaaaa!?! —Uguho!"

An odd scream resounded abruptly, and something made a "dosun" falling sound.

"Ugugugu... w, what on earth is this...? U, untie me, untie me, untie me!? W, who do you think I am—!"

Sigibert, who had tumbled to the ground, was shouting while wriggling like a caterpillar. Although it was good that the medicine had worn off and he had woken up at last, he probably fell from horseback when he stirred.

"Y, Your Excellency..."

The figure of Sigibert, who was covered all over with mud and shouting, completely had no dignity of a military vice-minister of a whole country. Clotilde walked up to him with an astringent expression, and when she untied the binding, Sigibert tried to stand up vigorously, and his foot slipped and he magnificently fell on his bottom.

"Pu—gya!"

Lightly driving his knee into the bottom of Valeria, who had seen that and was about to burst into laughter, and changing it into a scream, Dimitar nonchalantly spoke to Sigibert.

"Are you all right, Your Excellency?"

"U—... to have experienced something terrible"

"You don't seem to be injured; that's the best"

"You say "best"... it's not the best, good grief! What were the security people doing?"

"The person in charge of security is Your Excellency though"

"That sort of quibble is—eh? Are (*huh/eh*)? You're—"

Perhaps Sigibert who had thrown off his mantle, which was covered in mud and became very heavy, and stood up then finally realised that the other parties weren't his subordinates; he scratched his head with a "pori pori" as he kept opening his mouth halfway.

"Ah—... Richternach-kyou, and even... Costacurta-geika as well. Why in the world are the both of you here?"

"We were searching for Your Excellency together with Diaghilev-geika"

"Eh?"

"Your Excellency was kidnapped from the inn by the hands of the thieves. ... Do you not remember?"

Sigibert bent his mouth into a "he (^)" character and groaned at Clotilde's question.

"...I certainly remember that someone seemed to have broken in through the window, but I was suddenly covered with something and couldn't see anything, after that—when I realised, I was here"

"In any case, let's return to the town. Puyol-geika must be worried as well"

"Ah, umu..."

Sigibert, who had received Clotilde's help and straddled a horse, then stared at his right hand and sighed. Maybe he didn't feel at ease if he didn't have his favourite riding crop.

Clotilde placed one thief who was tied up on her horse and,

"Let's leave the remaining thieves here. After we return to the town, we can dispatch a party to apprehend them again"

"U, umu. I also think that that's good"

Dimitar who had straddled a horse together with Valeria spoke to Sigibert who had cleared his throat and said such a thing now.

"—At any rate, it was truly great that Your Excellency is safe. If something were to happen to Your Excellency, how much would our country's Isaac-denka have grieved... to the extent that I want to inform him of Your Excellency's safety with a fast horse even at once"

"Eh ah!? Ah, iya, it's fine, that kind of thing! T, there's no need to read too much into things like that, un, no need, no need, no need! After all, there's no need to go out of the way to cause him to worry!"

Sigibert hurriedly shook his head with a "buru buru". Certainly, the person in charge of security himself was successfully kidnapped by the thieves; furthermore, he received the assistance of Valeria whom he should have protected and was rescued, and if this wasn't handled properly, it might become an international problem and a mess where he besmirched Haiderota's honour. Most importantly, if this was known by Isaac, it might become an even more depressing situation than a reprimand from the king for Sigibert.

"Costacurta-geika, sorry to trouble you, but may I ask for a light?"

"Ah, hai"

Relying on the magic light that Valeria held up, Dimitar galloped the horse. Clotilde and Sigibert then followed from the rear.

"—Richternach-kyou"

Clotilde who had come shortening the distance spoke in a lowly subdued voice.

"...I'd like you to not say spiteful things to His Excellency too much"

"If that degree is spiteful, then Isaac-denka's one is a mental torture. —I thought that maybe that sort of exchange was a proof of friendship between the both of them for sure though"

"Richternach-kyou too, seems to be a person who loves sarcasm as much as that His Highness of yours"

"It depends on the time and situation. It was you who tried to make Our Eminence feel embarrassed at the beginning, so I'm also just matching that style. I was told by His Highness to retaliate if I had something done to me"

"That's..."

When Dimitar mentioned the matter of the dinner time, Clotilde knitted her brows like she was troubled and glanced at Valeria.

He had just observed for slightly one day only, but fundamentally, Clotilde was a person who was too serious and had a strong sense of responsibility. She also earned the trust from her subordinates, and possessed the disposition of someone who led others much more than Sigibert. Most importantly, she seemed to be fastidious and had a high pride.

It most likely wasn't her own idea, but probably because it was Sigibert's instruction that such a person would deliberately bring up that sort of topic at the place of the meal. After all, even if Clotilde had the thought of ascertaining the abilities of Valeria's party, such a malicious method didn't quite fit her image.

Clotilde inhaled a deep breath and nodded many times.

"...Very well, I guess. I shall talk to His Excellency myself so that such a thing won't happen hereafter. I don't want to create unnecessary discord between allies while it's turning into a situation like this"

"Thanks then"

When Dimitar nodded his head, Clotilde reduced her speed a little and lined up with Sigibert's horse. She was probably giving a warning to Sigibert immediately. Although he didn't know whether the party's visit to Aurillac would advance as planned from now on or not, at least they should be freed from that sort of sarcasm while they were in Haiderota.

"—Oi"

Estimating the time when Clotilde left, Dimitar spoke to Valeria.

"—Just now, if your magic wasn't on time, I planned to use a huge magic with the resolution of it going out of control. If a similar thing happens again next,

and in the case that I really cause it to go out of control, the possibility of you being nearby is high"

"Eh...?"

Valeria twisted her neck and looked up at Dimitar's face.

"S, so... what?"

"At that time, you must stop me"

"Huh!? "Stop it from going out of control" you say, if I remember correctly, the magic crest—"

It was precisely because she had received teachings from Orvieto in the Magic Academy (*Furigana: Prasa Marefikos*) that she, as one would expect, seemed to know at least the method to cope with it when magic power went out of control. In the event that magic became impossible to control due to it going out of control, the thing which one should do first was to sever the magic crest that had the flow of magic power—that was to say, damaged the magic crest and magic power normally wouldn't flow.

"Normally, it'll be fine with that. However, my magic crest won't disappear even if you injure my skin"

"Then what should I do?"

"Hit me with all your strength and make me lose consciousness. It was stopped with that last time too"

"You say "last time"... Babel-geika?"

"Yes. I suddenly had something done to me with a "gatsun", so I don't understand well, but Lucius said that she seemed to have hit me with all her strength with a stone of the extent of an infant's head. ...If Her Eminence wasn't a master of curing magic, I might have died as it was"

"You... perhaps, the reason for quitting the Chivalric Order is—"

"It seems that various rumours are floating around, but there's nothing to be said from my own mouth. —I've the obligation to keep secrets"

Wiping his right hand which was slippery due to the rain on the thigh of his

trousers—it didn't have much meaning though—Dimitar struck and made the reins resound.



In the early morning where a dense morning fog rose, without concealing a big yawn, Amaddo's king, Jeffren Francesc, went down to the royal palace's courtyard.

Kamunyas-kyou, who appeared to have been made to go along with it, was vigorously tilting his head to the side, thinking that this was something unprecedented.

In order to deliver the personal letter which Foreign Minister Barzari had stayed up all night and finished writing to the location of the Seal Chivalric Order that should be standing by in the vicinity of the national border, a messenger was about to depart. It was, first of all, unprecedented that the king would go out of his way to send that off.

While Barzari-kyou was letting his quill pen run fluently under the candle's light, the king who should have been sound asleep spoke in a loud voice as if to blow away his sleepiness when he walked up to a young knight member who was kneeling motionlessly.

"Angel Saforcada!"

"Hai"

The youth, who wore a hair band that was made with plaited cords on his forehead, looked up at the king and nodded slightly.

"This is the fourth day that you've joined the Chivalric Order?"

"It's the third day"

"Is that so? This is a sudden big task, huh"

"Hai"

One could see that the features of the boy, Angel, which still preserved their childishness, seemed to be stiffening a little in nervousness. According to what Kamunyas heard, this boy just became a Seal Chivalric Order's member due to the recommendation of Gruma's influential person, Berumdes-kou. Although he

wasn't selected from the beginning for the mission of the Dominas guards this time since the linking up was delayed, to intentionally make that newcomer deliver the personal letter was also again unprecedented. Kamunyas didn't understand well the decision of the king who was about to intentionally make him do so.

Handing a long and narrow wooden box that stored the personal letter and a traffic certificate over to Angel, the king spoke.

"—Give this personal letter to my son, and follow my son's instructions afterwards"

"Acknowledged"

"You must hurry, all right?"

"Yes"

Hugging the wooden box which he had raised high and held with both hands in his chest, Angel stood up.

When seeing his standing figure like this, the sword on his waist and the Chivalric Order's mantle which seemed really new felt a little oversized for Angel. Although it was heard that he was 16, might he not be, in reality, one, two years younger?

Angel, who had straddled the white horse that was prepared, lightly scratched the tip of his nose where freckles remained and bowed very deeply towards the king and the ministers.

"This is disrespectful from atop the horse! Angel Saforcada, I'm off!"

The white horse neighed after his dignified statement, and the sound of horse's hooves resounded in the morning of the fog.

"Ou ou, what a lively youngster. It's to the extent that I want to make my son follow his example"

Seeing off the youth who had ran away, the king floated a smile that looked like a bitter smile.

"Your Majesty... why did you give this duty to such a young man?"

"N? Ah, there's no meaning in particular"

The king casually answered Kamunyas's question.

"If I have to say, I only thought of letting that youngster produce some kind of achievements"

"Is, is that so...?"

"At any rate, he's the youngster which that man-dono had specially spoke of and recommended. As a raw material, he might be excellent. —If so, it's better to use him continuously and let him accumulate experiences, right?"

"Yes..."

"It seems that my son is trying to reform that Chivalric Order as a combat-like group. If that's the case, then no matter how many excellent capable people there are, he won't be troubled"

"H, however, if we appoint the children of the low-status nobles to important positions too much, won't the opposition from the other great nobles become strong...?"

"I don't care about that sort of thing"

Folding his thick arms, the king snorted boldly. Waving his mantle and turning back, he took Kamunyas and the secondary retainers under him along and returned inside the royal palace.

"That Chivalric Order belongs to my son. It's fine if my son does as he wants. Even if something like then incurring the great nobles' opposition and suffering a setback happens, that might be a good experience. —I believe that the custom of the Crown Prince serving as the leader of the Seal Chivalric Order originally had an objective in such a matter"

"I, I see..."

Even on top of actual government affairs, the relationship between the royal family, the government and the nobles was very delicate and was something that one would be made to take into consideration. If he (*the Crown Prince*) could learn that in the Chivalric Order game that was similar to playing house, one could even say that it was playing a part in the bringing up of the future

monarch.

However, Kamunyas's worried look didn't slacken even though he heard so was because the Crown Prince was trying to make the Chivalric Order into a combat unit, not an ordinary game of make-believe. Especially nowadays, he (*Isaac*) had been discussing with Finance Minister Kaparos-kyou and Vice-Leader Lucius repeatedly; if the Chivalric Order really didn't become the playing place of the young nobles anymore from now on, wouldn't that become the cause of a serious confrontation between the royal family and the great nobles; Kamunyas thought about such a thing.

"Ma, for the time being, the things which we can do are finished with this"

The king clapped the shoulder of Kamunyas, who was bending slightly forwards and walking, very friendly with a "ban ban".

"—Everyone, thank you for your hard work! Slowly take a rest for now. Even if you don't rest, I'll properly go back to sleep, you know? Don't wake me up until noon, all right, Kamunyas"

"A, acknowledged..."

Laughing loudly with a "gahhahha!", the king went towards his own room.

When Kamunyas, who was holding down his aching shoulder and bowing, breathed a sigh of relief, he then went straight towards his office without returning to his mansion.

Although the king had said such a thing, there was no way that a person in the position of being called "the country's elder statesman" could sleep leisurely in this situation.



It was the time when perhaps the first crow of the cock would begin crowing very soon that Valeria's party came back to Klutoreto's tabard inn.

On that way back, Valeria and Dimitar tried to ask the person concerned, Sigibert, about that girl, but this His Excellency's memory was vague as expected—to put it bluntly, it was of no use whatsoever.

Although he was called out to by the members who had come out to the vast

garden and was waving his hand in a carefree manner, saying things like "Yaa yaa, thank you for your hard work, gentlemen!", if Sigibert wasn't a man who was called "His Excellency", he might have lost his life about this time.

"Y, Your Excellency~y! Your Eminence~!"

Perhaps they heard the news that these four people had returned safely, Malena and Arushanbor came rushing out from the inside of the lodging house. Following that, Karin, Petra and Bettina also came along. It seemed that the fire at the stable had already been extinguished, and in the night air where the drizzle continued to fall, they hardly sensed that burnt smell anymore.

"Oh, Puyol-geika! It appears that I've caused you to worry. However, if it's about me, then there's no need to worry; indeed, your worry is unnecessary, unnecessary!"

"It, it's not that at all!"

Malena who had come running to the front of Sigibert, who was covered all over with mud and trying to look good, passed a letter which she had been holding—upon a little hesitation—to Clotilde for some reason. Maa, it was an understandable decision somehow.

"...What is it? Did something happen again?"

"Seems like it"

Karin came along and whispered in a low voice to Valeria who had received Dimitar's help and dismounted from the horse.

"...A short time ago, an express messenger from Aurillac arrived"

"The one who will come along at such a period of time is at least a messenger who will inform us of a state of emergency. ...It doesn't seem to be good news"

"—Everyone"

Clotilde whose complexion had changed came along towards Valeria's party that was sitting on the edge of the water fountain in front of the entrance.

"...A new problem has arisen again. We must return to Aurillac immediately after this"

"What do you mean?"

"There might be... an outbreak of war"

"Is it perhaps with... Yururogu?"

"Hai. —Though their total number is unknown, it's said that Yururogu's rebel army has appeared at a place that is 100 leagues (482.8 km) north of Aurillac..."

"Their large army appeared at such a place all of a sudden?"

"Iya... they had probably used warships"

Dimitar, who had put his hand on his knee and stood up, turned his neck with a "guruu" and sighed.

"—I've heard that the navy of Haiderota which faces the northern sea is quite a thing. If so, Yururogu might also be something similar. If their warships go up a big river, won't they be able to send in a large army to the inland considerably?"

"That's most likely so. ...As the sea had been rough because of the stormy weather these last few days, the discovery might have been late due to that"

"Requisition horses from the residents here!"

Clotilde turned around at that voice.

"—Carry only the necessary minimum luggage, work around-the-clock, prepare spare horses and return to the capital! The departure is one hour later! All members, start your preparations!"

Having Malena prepare a change of clothes, Sigibert was issuing instructions to Arushanbor and the others on this and that. It was extremely imperious that, lamenting the blunder of himself who was successfully kidnapped in his own way, he might be thinking of wanting to make up for it somehow.

"...For this reason, we can no longer accompany you to the capital"

"Even if we're told so, we'll be troubled, you see. ...I've explained to you about that kid, right?"

"...I'm sorry, what's this talk about a kid?"

While Clotilde and Dimitar were having a conversational exchange, Karin asked Valeria quietly.

"Ah... un. There was a strange child"

Her mood became dark when she recalled the matter at that time, but it was impossible not to explain. Valeria briefly talked to Karin and the others and told them about the formidable girl whom she and Dimitar had encountered.

"Ehhh!? T, then, doesn't this mean that, that magic warrior girl, might, still be hiding in this vicinity!"

Bettina slightly walked pigeon-toed and started stamping.

"...What if you go pee while you've the chance?"

"I, I can't go to the toilet by myself immediately after hearing a story like that!"

"—Oi"

What kind of discussion did he have with Clotilde; Dimitar then spoke to Valeria's party. Clotilde had already returned to her original duty and was briskly giving instructions to her subordinates.

"What will you do? She said that she doesn't mind us coming together with them though"

"You say "together"... , but they intend to return to the capital at full speed, right!?"

"It seems that they'll provide three horses and a carriage"

Even if they prepared a carriage, it was probably impossible to follow the warhorses' full speed, and even the other attendants whom Valeria's party was accompanied by must all be left behind here.

"She said to follow them knowing that it's impossible, or to remain here and wait for the welcome from Amaddo after they leave about 10 guards behind—choose the one that we like"

"Though she said "choose"~, in reality, doesn't she think that it's a bother if they're followed by us? I can hear that as an act of ostensible kindness done in one's own interest~"

"That is so, isn't it; it's because a large-scale battle might occur near the

capital by some chance. If an accident happens to the state guests from Amaddo at such a place, even if they repel Yururogu's army, Haiderota's reputation will fall"

"That's true... if it's to the extent that they've to take such a risk, it might be better to be called "a little impolite" and get us to return to Amaddo as it is. At the least, if it's Diaghilev-geika who is at the scene, she should have concluded so"

"...But we even thought of going through hardships to rescue Sigibert-kakka, and yet they said "please return to your country quickly" because of a state of emergency; it feels like our efforts have come to naught somehow"

When Valeria inadvertently complained so, Dimitar suddenly looked back at Clotilde and,

"Your Eminence! Our conversation just now, concerning the matter of the horses and the carriage, we'll gratefully receive them"

"Hey—what are you deciding at your own discretion!?"

"It's a very waste of time to be worrying about this and that"

Perhaps the burn was itchy because it was just healed, Dimitar spoke while rubbing his arm.

"It's for Amaddo's national interest that we've purposely trod on thin ice. That being the case, our actions hereafter should also think about the national interest as the top priority. ...Of course, there's the alternative of having both Her Eminences return to our country safely for the sake of national interest as well, but in that case too, I don't intend to sluggishly stay in contact with Amaddo here. If we board the carriage and leave at dawn, we can cross the national border by dusk"

"To go north or to go south, you must decide that"; Dimitar thrust this at Valeria and Karin.

"Gacha Pink will go prepare for leaving here, and Glasses will go explain the situation to the maids. —Meanwhile, I'll do your emergency treatment"

"Eh? Me?"

"If I connect some lines, they might be usable to a certain extent. It's better than doing nothing"

"Ah..."

Valeria stood in a line with Dimitar, sat on the edge of the water fountain and held out her right arm.

"...I'm sorry that you're in the middle of your medical treatment, can you give me just a moment?"

When Valeria was grimacing and enduring the pain, Karin sat beside her.

"This time, it's like I haven't done anything, isn't it?"

"...So?"

"It'll be strange if I say that returning as things are is unpleasant..., but if I were to state the official stance, I think that contributing to the resolution of the alliance's internal dispute is an important job of Amaddo"

"I see... that's a plausible reason"

"Besides, that child whom you said that you saw... she was holding it, right?"

"Un"

To say the truth, Valeria was also worrying about that the most.

What that girl was holding was unmistakably a magic motion sword. Where in the world did that come out from—did Yururogu have the technology to develop that on its own, or was it the same as Hokon and Dante, that it was provided by someone? The monopoly of magic engineering (*Furigana: Tekunorogia Marefika*); if that couldn't be done, then to Amaddo that tried to always be in the forefront, it was a problem that they couldn't overlook.

Dimitar, who had been drawing and adding magic crests on Valeria's right arm, raised his lips at the Dominas' conversation and nodded.

"...Ma, that might be appropriate. Honestly speaking, that girl's knife falling into Haiderota's hands isn't amusing, and whether Haiderota has such a technology or not, it's better if we can investigate such a matter too"

It seemed that their answer had come out.

When Valeria was grimacing at the pain that was similar to her skin being torn and trembling lightly, Karin quietly whispered into her ear.

"...Come to think of it, I noticed this a little while ago though"

"Eh? Noticed what?"

"You've come to call Richternach-kyou "Dimitar""

"__"

Valeria opened her eyes wide and stared at Karin's face, and then hurriedly looked at Dimitar. Fortunately, was Karin's whisper just now inaudible, or was he only concentrating on his work; as he held Valeria's right arm, Dimitar was carefully sliding his finger on that white skin, and there was no indication of him meddling in their conversation.

Valeria lowered her voice, grasped Karin's hand and shook it.

"Hey! Don't say irresponsible things! If they're heard by this person, it'll turn into a strange thing again, right!?"

"...I'm sorry, did you perhaps not notice this yourself?"

"Eh?"

"Like I said, the matter of you calling him "Dimitar". —I see, you've been unconsciously calling him so"

Narrowing her eyes and staring at Valeria, Karin nodded quietly. That face, which was mixed with a faint smile that seemed to want to say "I've understood everything", was somehow very odious.

"It's... it's that! I, I'm simply avoiding troubles only!"

"What's troublesome?"

"T, that's because—when Lucius-sama is present, everyone will be confused if I call him "Richternach-kyou"..."

"I'm sorry, even though Lucius-sama has returned to Roma, you've been calling him "Dimitar, Dimitar", haven't you?"

"S, such a thing—"

"Oi"

Dimitar interrupted the words of the flustered Valeria.

"—You understand whose magic crests I'm restoring, right? If you're going to speak in a jumble and struggle, it's fine even if I forcibly do this after tying you like the last time, you know?"

"U—"

At the very moment when she was given a glare with a "girori", Valeria shut her mouth.

Valeria herself certainly didn't notice that she had been calling Dimitar "Dimitar" before she became aware of it either. Perhaps Dimitar making the face like he was a little surprised might be due to that way of calling.

However, suddenly returning to the way of calling him "Richternach-kyou" like until now just because it was pointed out by Karin like this, she might, on the contrary, be teased by Karin saying that she was too conscious of it.

Thus, Valeria pretended that she was enduring the pain, closed her eyes and shut out the noises from the outside world.



Epilogue: Cross That Bridge and Advance.

Regarding the historical question of who the world's first **magic warrior** (*Furigana: Marefikos*) was, each nation was unable to give a precise answer.

As for the “**Holy Alliance's** (*Furigana: Riga Santourear*)” standpoint, it wanted to think that surely the 12 Shinto priests who had helped Reduntra were the world's first magic warriors, but as one would expect, they were only spoken of in legends—one might hesitate to record them, whose exact names weren't even handed down, as the original magic warriors in the history books.

However, among the people who learned magic in reality, because of a simpler and more satisfactory reason, there was also a faction which claimed that the first magic warriors should be what were now called “**Hiera Glaphicos**”.

That was to say, they who were given the magic crests to draw **magic crests** (*Furigana: Hieratika*) by Reduntra produced the magic warriors after that.

At dawn's ground level after the rain, sounds which were similar to thunder were roaring.

The number of men and horses kicking up mud and running at full speed towards north-northwest might have easily exceeded 100. The majority were warhorses of splendid build, and straddling their saddles were men in resplendent military uniforms, but small horses without saddles and horses which were loaded with luggage were also mixed in among them.

The only one thing which they had in common was that they kept running at an extraordinary speed. It might certainly be appropriate to call that “gale (*Furigana: Rafaule*)”.

Dimitar, who had kept a short distance at the rearmost of that group, looked at the carriage that was travelling beside him.

"...At this pace, we definitely can't even last half a day. The horses will be worn out"

Although Dimitar was riding a horse together with Valeria, Karin, Petra and

above all, Bettina, who was equivalent to a mass of metal, were on the two-horse carriage. In addition, since it was loaded with luggage, the burden on the two horses which were pulling the carriage was greater than Dimitar's horse that had two people riding it.

"We don't have spare horses, right!? What should we do?"

Bettina who was striking the reins with a "pishi pishi" and hurrying the horses shouted, looking panicked.

"If there's a town or village along the way, we can change horses there. Until then, it's fine if we can follow to the extent of not losing sight of them. ...Rather, to be separated this much will result in us not covered with mud, I guess"

"Even though you say town—"

Karin opened and checked the map.

"...We still haven't cross a bridge that appears to be a bridge, have we?"

"Is there something wrong about it?"

"According to this map... there's a river ahead, and it looks like there's a village when we go further from there"

"A river? Is it big?"

"Who knows? Since it's written in the map, it's probably not a small river though"

"...If I remember correctly, this highway is the shortest course to Aurillac?"

"That's right... originally, there should have been an arrangement to advance here because of the parade though"

"Gacha Pink, reduce the speed slightly"

"H, hai?"

"Let the horses rest a little until we come back"

"You say "come back"... eh? Are you going somewhere?"

"There's something that I want to ascertain a little with the soldier Her Eminence"

Leaving what was said so behind, Dimitar increased the horse's speed. Separating from the carriage in one breath and overtaking even the extreme rear of the group that was moving forwards, he advanced towards the front rapidly.

"—What on earth is it?"

Narrowing her eyes in the moist morning breeze, Valeria asked.

"If Yururogu's people chose the timing when the Gale Chivalric Order (*Furigana: Rorudor Rafuale*)—or more precisely, when the two Dominas are absent from the capital at the same time to mobilise their army, what would they do?"

"That... maa, setting Malena aside, as an actual war potential and a leader who inspires the soldiers, Clotilde-san is an important existence to Haiderota's army, right? If that's the case, isn't there such a possibility too?"

"Sigibert's kidnapping might be a trap to lure Clotilde out and kill her, or a plan to confine Clotilde to the border"

"I see... if Sigibert-kakka was kidnapped as it was, then the Gale Chivalric Order certainly might not be able to return to the capital. Their leader is, to the end, His Excellency, and in Clotilde-san's situation, she can't abandon His Excellency and return to the capital, right?"

"If that's the case"

Supposing that that girl's party was Yururogu's spies—assuming that one of the objectives was to confine Clotilde's party to the vicinity of the national border—.

"If I'm those people, I'll make the bridge spanning the river fall"

"Eh!?"

"This road is the shortest course to Aurillac. If those people whose kidnapping of Sigibert had ended in failure try to prevent us from leaving further, making the bridge which exists on our way fall is the quickest and easiest"

If the water level rose due to the rain just then, there was also a possibility that they couldn't cross the river unless there was a bridge. If they were forced

to search for another bridge and change their course, their arrival to the capital might certainly be delayed.

Overtaking several tens of horses in a short time, Dimitar who had come close to the head of the group recognised Clotilde's hair that was fluttering just like a flag and shouted in a loud voice.

"Diaghilev-geika!"

"...It's the both of you, huh"

Clotilde, who had noticed Dimitar's party, had a look similar to a bitter smile mixed within her slight exhaustion.

"I never expect you to follow until here... I can't guarantee your personal safety though?"

"We are aware of that. ...Or rather, if we return even though we aren't told to return by our own country, there might be malicious rumours that Amaddo's Dominas are cowards"

"You can do as you like"

"More than such a matter, there's something that I want to ask"

"What is it?"

"There seems to be a river ahead?"

"Yes, we'll run into it soon"

"Is it a big river?"

"That's correct... is something the matter with it?"

"Assuming that those people are Yururogu's spies; if I'm in those people's position, I'd make that bridge fall"

"__"

Clotilde's eyes narrowed all of a sudden.

"Or if it's to deal a blow to you who are trying to return to Aurillac in a hurry, they'll make the bridge fall when you're about to cross the river. If the bridge is still spanning it, perhaps the enemies who are choosing the timing to make it

fall might be lying hidden in the vicinity"

Dimitar, who had explained up to there by fast-talking, suddenly knitted his brows and looked around the surroundings.

"...His Excellency?"

"His Excellency is running at the front. Puyol-geika as well"

Clotilde braced her feet that she had put on the stirrup, stood up and ordered the surrounding members.

"All members! Go from gallop to canter so that there's no confusion! Slowly reduce your speed as it is!"

The members of the well-ordered Gale Chivalric Order responded to Clotilde's command immediately and began to slow down their speed. However, perhaps her voice didn't reach; about 30 horsemen at the front left the following ones behind and ran swiftly as it was.

"Your Excellency...!"

In order to detain Sigibert's party, Clotilde increased her speed instead and was hot on the heels of the leading group.

"—Oi"

While galloping their horse together with Clotilde, Dimitar spoke to Valeria.

"Pay attention to the surroundings. We don't know where that kid is hiding herself at after all"

"Un..."

Although that girl should also have damaged her magic crests in the battle with Dimitar's party, there was a magic motion sword (*Furigana: Espada Marefika*) in her hands. They couldn't be negligent.

"Stop! All members stop! There's a possibility that an ambush is lying hidden! Sigibert-kakka! Puyol-geika!"

The members who were overtaken by Clotilde understood the meaning of those words and were reducing their speed gradually, but Sigibert's party hadn't stopped yet.

"Oi! Stop! Did you not hear that!?"

When Dimitar shouted with an impolite manner of speaking, Sigibert finally looked back over his shoulder at the rear.

"Your Excellency! It's dangerous beyond that point! Please wait—"

"Eh? What are you saying, Diaghilev-geika? If we don't hurry somehow or other now—"

Sigibert's voice was drowned out by a roaring sound.

"__"

A deep-crimson fireball which had come flying from the opposite shore impacted around the middle of the bridge, and with that as a start, the very long bridge began to collapse from its centre towards the shores. Sigibert's party that had started to cross the bridge already, without being able to retrace their steps at once, fell down towards the river, whose water level had risen, together with the collapsing building materials.

"Uowaaaaaaa!?"

"Your Excellency!"

About two thirds of the bridge's centre had collapsed completely, and only one part of both shores remained. Clotilde jumped off her horse, bent herself forwards from a place of the very limit and looked down at the river where the current was fast.

"Your Excellency! Puyol-geika!"

"Dimitar! Over there!"

"__"

In contrast to Clotilde who was looking below, Dimitar and Valeria looked to the front.

Near the treetop of a tall oak tree that was growing on the opposite shore, that girl who was covered with bandages was holding the knife and standing up. The blow just now was most likely that girl's action.

"...Chii"

Clicking his tongue, he grasped Jagieruka's hilt tightly. However, perhaps the other party also noticed that Dimitar's party was present; the girl then quickly jumped down from the tree and disappeared to somewhere as it was.

"To be done in this way as expected—"

Spitting out his anger quietly, Dimitar dismounted the horse.

At that time, the following members came running in succession, and started the rescue operation of Sigibert's party which had fallen down into the river on Clotilde's instruction.

However, the water level was high and the current was fast because of the rain just then. There seemed to be people who had hit their heads at the moment when they fell together with the rubble and were seriously injured, and even people who had lost their lives.

"...I see"

Karin, who was considerably late and had come along, looked at the collapsed bridge and the completely exhausted members who were pulled up one after another, and appeared to have mostly understood what had happened.

"This way of collapsing... was some trick not done from the beginning?"

"That might be the case. I don't think that the centre would crumble down completely to this point due to a magic of that degree. They most likely had also imagined the event where the kidnapping of His Excellency ended in failure and conceived this plan"

At that time, a shout of joy rose from among the members who had been undertaking the rescue.

"Ah! It looks like His Excellency was found!"

Sigibert, who had clung onto a rope and was pulled up, fell with a thud and was panting; his uniform which he had changed with considerable effort was sodden and covered with mud again. To have fallen into that current together with the rubble and ended with that, one could say that he was lucky.

"If it's the treatment of the casualties, Our Eminences can also help though"

When Dimitar called out to her so, Clotilde who was fixedly staring at the

opposite shore nodded together with a deep sigh.

"Thank you very much. —However, with this..."

Since this bridge had fallen, they had no choice but to take other routes to the capital. When thinking about the rescue and treatment of the casualties, the retrieval of horses that were washed away and so forth, one could say that this was an enormous loss.

Where was the objective of the troops from Yururogu—in a blitz military operation that had the invasion of Aurillac in mind, or in a pillage that treated the towns in the vicinity as targets; that wasn't known yet, but it might be possible to say that at least the offence and defence in this opening were completely Yururogu's victory.

"What should we do, Dimitar?"

Valeria who was helping the treatment of the casualties looked up at Dimitar and asked him. Putting his hand on his nape, Dimitar shook his head with a sigh mixed in.

"Don't ask me. ...Ma, if you think about His Excellency's situation, they probably have no choice but to head for Aurillac even if they make a detour though"

"It's not that; I mean "what should we do?""

"...It's decided"

Answering so and then shutting his mouth, Dimitar looked back at the rear.

The dawn which had come shining from the other side of the mountain ridge dazzlingly burnt Dimitar's retinas.

あまがき

カリンさまの寝あきに
リハビリしました。
こんにちは、ミキリアです。
「ロドリゴ」が「少しずつ」いろんな
表情を見せてくれるんじゃないかと
思うとたまらないです。
次はもうちょっとこのページの絵にも
力を入れる余裕が
欲しいですね！
ははは...

201208
ミキリア